WESTERN, ACTION AND SPORT STORIES

20c
IN CANADA 25c

CLAYTON MAGAZINES

Ace-High MAGAZINE

Second February Number

THE SUN-TRAP AT SAGUARO

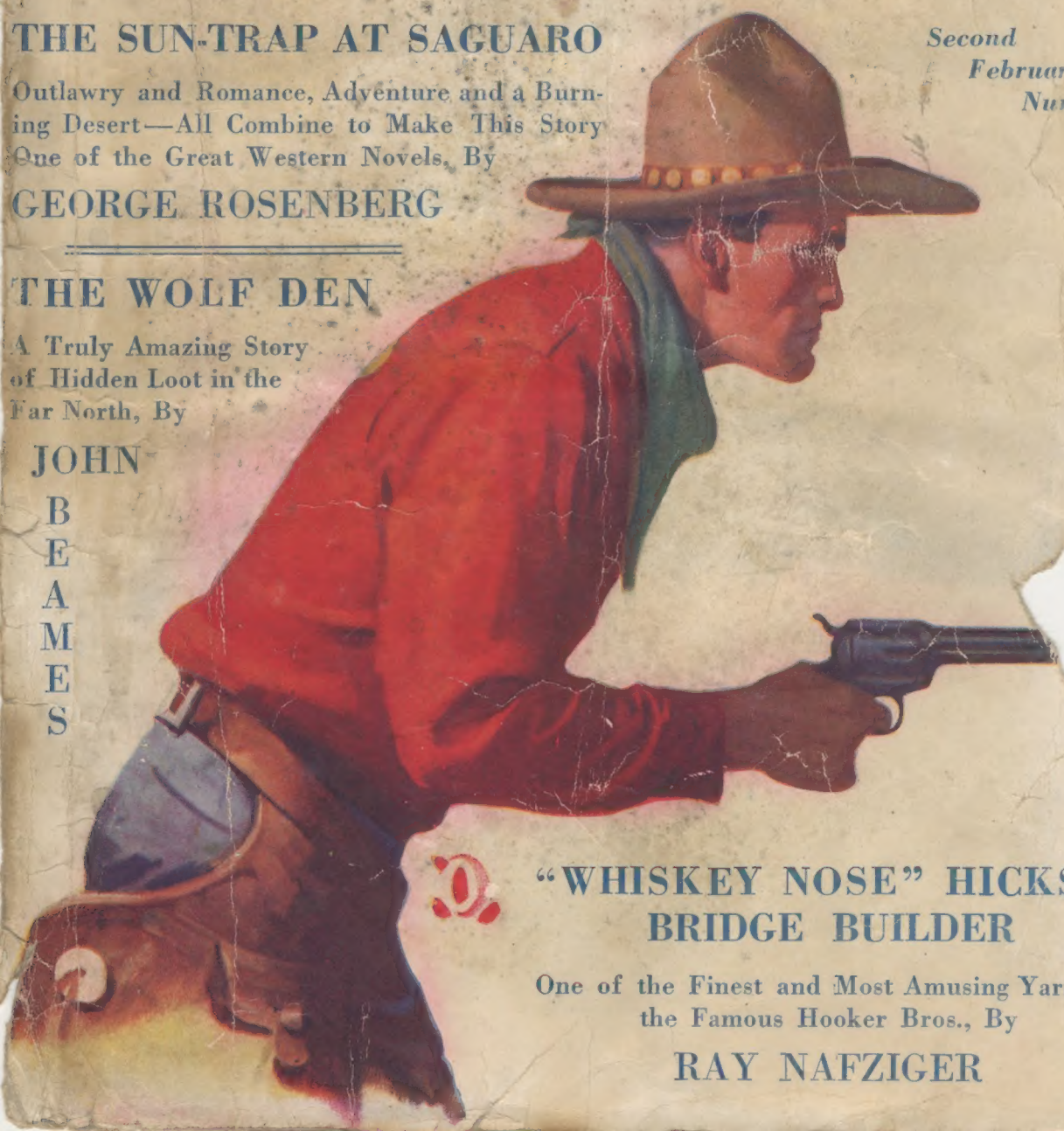
Outlawry and Romance, Adventure and a Burning Desert—All Combine to Make This Story One of the Great Western Novels, By

GEORGE ROSENBERG

THE WOLF DEN

A Truly Amazing Story of Hidden Loot in the Far North, By

JOHN BEAMES



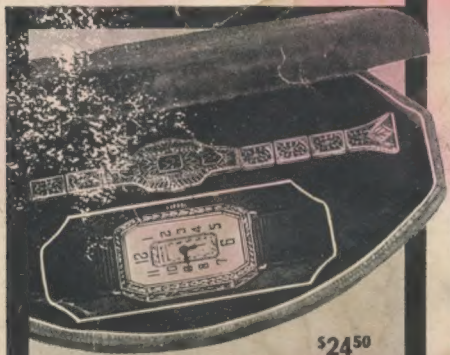
"WHISKEY NOSE" HICKS—BRIDGE BUILDER

One of the Finest and Most Amusing Yarns of the Famous Hooker Bros., By

RAY NAFZIGER

GENUINE DIAMONDS STANDARD WATCHES

on Liberal Credit Terms . . .



$24.50

EL 41 . . . The new Deauville Combination Beautifully engraved rectangular case Accurate, dependable 15-jewel movement. Pierced flexible, link bracelet with beautiful center design, set with 3 Emeralds or Sapphires and silk grosgrain ribbon band—elegant gift case. Only $2.35 a month.

Guaranteed Savings

Direct Diamond Importations

How to Order—Just send $1.00 with your order and your selection comes to you on **10 Days Free Trial. No C. O. D. to pay on arrival.** After full examination and free trial, pay balance in 10 equal monthly payments.

Satisfaction Guaranteed

10 DAYS FREE TRIAL

You have the privilege of 10 days free trial—if not completely satisfied return shipment at our expense and the entire deposit will be refunded. Written guarantee bond with every purchase.

All Dealings Strictly Confidential

Nearly a year to pay! No extra charge for credit—no red tape—no delay. You take no risk—satisfaction absolutely guaranteed or money back.

Gift Case Free. Every article comes to you in a beautiful and appropriate gift case.

Diamond Wrist Watch

$37.50

EL 8 . . . **Diamond Wrist Watch.** 2 genuine diamonds and 8 emeralds or sapphires set in engraved 14K Solid White Gold Case. Guaranteed 15-jewel movement. Pierced flexible "Wristacrat" bracelet with sapphires or emeralds to match. Only $3.65 a month.

$37.50

It's a BULOVA

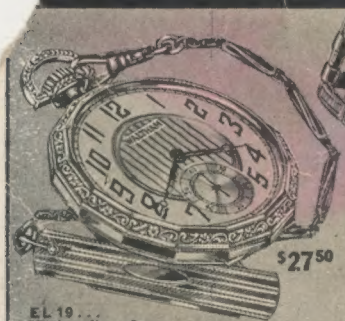
EL 40 . . . "Lone Eagle"—Dedicated to Col. Charles A. Lindbergh—Handsomely engraved lifetime case, guaranteed 15-jewel movement. Radium hands and dial. Patented "dust-tite" protector. Flexible link bracelet to match. Only $3.65 a month.

$48.50

EL 39 . . . "America's Sweetheart." Ultra modern, 18K Solid White Gold engagement ring; finest quality dazzling genuine blue-white diamond in center, 6 matched genuine diamonds on "step-sides." Only $4.75 a mo.

Catalogue **FREE** To Adults

Completely illustrated new catalog of genuine diamonds, Bulova, Elgin, Waltham, Howard Illinois watches; fine jewelry and silverware at special prices. Write now to get your Free Copy.



$27.50

EL 19 . . . Nationally advertised, tested and regulated 15-jewel **Waltham** movement; 20-year warranted, engraved White Gold filled, 12 size, thin model, decagon case. White gold filled knife, fine Waldemar chain. All complete in fine gift case. Only $2.65 a month.

$22

EL 42 . . . Nationally Advertised **Waltham** or **Elgin**; guaranteed accurate and dependable. Handsomely engraved lifetime case. Very latest style "Hollywood" bracelet, with extension opening. Only $2.10 a month.

10 DAYS FREE TRIAL

All Transactions Strictly Confidential

Sent for $1 — Balance 10 MONTHS TO PAY

$48.50

EL 12 . . . Dazzling cluster of seven (7) expertly matched genuine blue-white diamonds; hand pierced 18K Solid White Gold, lady's ring. Looks like a $750 solitaire. Only $4.75 a month.

$50

EL 46 . . Charming, new lace design, 18K Solid White Gold dinner ring, set with 3 perfectly matched genuine blue-white diamonds, 2 French blue sapphires on sides. Only $4.90 a month.

$25.75

EL 18 . . . Wedding ring of beautifully hand engraved 18K Solid White Gold set with 7 expertly matched, genuine blue-white diamonds. Only $2.48 a month.

$50

EL 7 . . Gentlemen's massive ring, 14K solid green gold with the latest style 18K solid white gold top; fiery, genuine, blue-white diamond. Only $4.90 a month.

$25

EL 34 . . . Richly hand engraved 18K Solid White Gold solitaire mounting; fiery, genuine blue-white diamond. Only $2.40 a month.

$27.50

EL 22 . . . Gentlemen's massive, hand engraved ring of 14K Solid White Gold. Imported Black Onyx with a genuine fiery diamond or any carved initial or standard emblem desired. Only $2.65 a month.

$25

EL 44 . . . Very chic—beautiful hand pierced floral design ring of 18K Solid White Gold, set with genuine Aquamarine or any birthstone; 2 genuine diamonds on sides. Only $2.40 a month.

ESTABLISHED 1895

ROYAL DIAMOND & WATCH CO.

ADDRESS DEPT. 43-P

170 BROADWAY, NEW YORK

Do YO U.S.

FOR MEN & WOME
INSIDE or OUTSIDE WORK

SPECIAL AGENTS
(Investigators)
Start $200 to $250 Month

Government Secret Service Work is one of the most fascinating and interesting branches of the service for men. These positions are located throughout the country and are both traveling and stationary. In addition to the high salaries that run up to $5,000 yearly, all traveling expenses are paid while on the road.

RAILWAY MAIL JOB

$1,900 to $2,700 Year

This is a very fascinating position for men who like to travel. It gives you an excellent chance to see the country free. You are usually on duty four days and off duty four days, but are paid for full time. You receive extra allowance for hotel expense when away from home, and when you grow old you are retired with a pension which makes you comfortable the balance of your life.

RURAL and CITY CARRIERS
$1,400 to $2,000 Year

The Rural Mail Carrier is out in the open air and sunshine, easy, healthy work, short hours, with a large part of the day left to do as he pleases. Thousands of city positions available for those who prefer inside work, delivering mail in large office buildings. These positions available to both country and city people.

Many of these positions are ideal for men who like healthy outdoor work, where they can enjoy the forests and mountain trails. The duties vary from patrolling our borders and forests, acting as Game, Fish and Fire Warden, furnishing information to tourists, etc., to clerical work. You also receive an annual vacation with pay.

Thous
Desirable

If you want a steady Go
where strikes, hard tim
will not affect you, where
twelve months' pay every y
when you become old be reti
sion for the balance of your l
Uncle Sam's payroll. Stop wor
joy your life. Pick the position you wa
longs to you just as much as to anyone
Then why not get it? It is all up to you!
positions described in this announcement are on
a few of the many desirable ones obtainable. Fill
out the coupon below, cut or tear it out, and
mail *today*, and full particulars will be sent you
immediately.

CUSTOMS INSPECTOR
$2,100 Year to Start

The duties are to check and inspect goods brought into this country by tourists, merchants, and manufacturers. Inspectors are required to levy the duties, etc., and see that Customs regulations are not violated. This is a very fascinating work with splendid salaries.

MEAT INSPECTORS
$1,500 to $1,860 Year and Upward

This is a very interesting work. Farmers, butchers or anyone with a knowledge of live stock, food products, meats, etc., are in line for one of these positions. The salaries and promotions are based on the ability and interest shown in this work. Both men and women are eligible.

M
TH
COUPON
NOW

BORDER PATROL GUARDS, FOREST and FIELD CLERKS. HEALTHY OUTDOOR POSITIONS

- ☐ Railway Mail Clerks
- ☐ Prohibition Investigators
- ☐ R.F.D. Carriers
- ☐ Special Agents
- ☐ U. S. Border Patrol
- ☐ Tel. Operator
- ☐ City Mail Carrier
- ☐ Meat Inspector
- ☐ Bookkeeper
- ☐ Customs Inspector
- ☐ U. S. Guards
- ☐ P. O. Clerk
- ☐ File Clerk
- ☐ General Clerk
- ☐ Matrons
- ☐ Watchman
- ☐ Skilled Laborer
- ☐ Postmasters
- ☐ Steno.—Typist
- ☐ Emigrant Inspector
- ☐ Seamstress
- ☐ Auditor
- ☐ Steno.—Secretary

INSTRUCTION BUREAU
Dept. 417, St. Louis, Mo.

Send me immediately, FREE, full particulars about positions marked "X". Also your big list of other positions obtainable, salaries, locations, how to qualify, opportunities, etc.

NAME .....

ADDRESS .....

...y Other Friday

...es on sale, Friday, February 6, 1931)

... MAGAZINE

...MAS, *Editor* C. H. WHIPPLE, *Managing Editor*

...andard on a Magazine Guarantees:

...are clean, interesting, vivid; by leading writers of the day
...nditions approved by the Authors' League of America;
...re manufactured in Union Shops by American workmen;
... and agent is insured a fair profit;
...censorship guards their advertising pages.

The other Clayton magazines are:

...ES, COWBOY STORIES, CLUES, FIVE-NOVELS
...ELAND LOVE STORY MAGAZINE, ASTOUNDING
...R DETECTIVE STORIES, WESTERN ADVENTURES
AND WESTERN LOVE STORIES.

...quired to Supply the Monthly Demand for Clayton Magazines.

SECOND FEBRUARY NUMBER No. 2

.....Jerry Delano

A Complete Novel

...RAP AT SAGUARO.....George Rosenberg 179
Larry Webb fights grim death and an outlaw's grave in the desert.

Seven Short Stories

"WHISKEY-NOSE" HICKS—BRIDGE BUILDER.....Ray Nafziger 170
Anything can happen in Quiveras County—to the Hooker Bros.

...EDITOR ELVAN.....S. Omar Barker 217
Blackie Elvan puts out a surprise edition—and punctuates it with bird shot.

THE WOLF DEN.....John Beames 228
The cave was full of gold—but no place to spend a Northwoods holiday.

BIG ROWELS.....Francis W. Hilton 235
Clee Sanborn tackles a job that calls for range savvy and a fast gun.

THE ARMY AVALANCHE.....James W. Egan 248
This punch would keep some boxfighters down, but not an old army man.

GAMBLIN' WITH DEATH.....Stephen Payne 259
A range kid ties up with a pretty hard hombre.

POUND FOR POUND.....Frederick L. Nebel 270
It takes a tough man to beat the tropic jungle.

A Serial Novel

LEAD LAW.....Amos Moore 279
A Story of Romance and Adventure in the West—Part Three.

A Western Poem

THE DAY'S WORK.....Bob McCormick 169
The Border Patrol rides out.

Special Features

THE SLUICE BOX.....John A. Thompson 298
A mining and prospecting department.

HOWDY, FOLKS!.....The Editor 302
Concerning this or that.

THE COUNTRY STORE..... 303
If you wish to exchange something you have but don't want, for something you want that someone else has, here is the place to do it.

Single Copies 20 Cents (In Canada 25 Cents) Yearly Subscription $4.00

Issued bi-weekly by Readers' Publishing Corporation, 80 Lafayette St., New York. Fred Schiverea, Jr., President; H. Mayer, Treasurer. Entered as second-class matter July 8, 1921, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under the Act of March 3, 1879. Title registered as a Trade-mark in the U. S. Patent Office. Copyright, 1931, by Readers' Publishing Corp. Member Newsstand Group; Men's List—For advertising rates address E. R. Crowe & Co., Inc., 25 Vanderbilt Avenue, New York, or 225 North Michigan Avenue, Chicago. This issue dated February 27, 1931.

Get Into One Of These BIG PAY FIELDS

All practical work on real Electrical machinery

Amazingly Easy Way to Get Into ELECTRICITY

Don't spend your life waiting for $5 raises in a dull, hopeless job! Let me show you how to make up to $60, $70 and even $200 a week, in Electricity — NOT BY CORRESPONDENCE, but by an amazing way to teach that makes you a practical Expert in 90 days!

LEARN WITHOUT BOOKS IN 90 DAYS

No Books! No Lessons! You learn by doing actual electrical work right here in the Coyne Shops. You are trained on huge motors, generators, switchboards, transmitting stations, power plants, auto and airplane engines, etc. You don't need advanced education or previous experience. You qualify for real electrical work in 90 days!

Earn While You Learn

Don't worry about a job! You get FREE life-time Employment Service. And don't let lack of money stop you. If you need part-time work to help pay living expenses, I'll help you get it. Coyne is 31 years old. Coyne Training is tested. You can find out everything FREE. Just mail coupon below and I'll send you my BIG FREE ELECTRICAL BOOK, telling all about jobs—salaries, etc. This does not obligate you. Just send the coupon below!

Student working on Television transmitter in Coyne Radio Shops

Learn RADIO TELEVISION TALKING PICTURES

Every branch of Radio is calling for trained men! 5,000 Service Men needed at once. Big call for Wireless Operators, both at Sea and in the Air. Many jobs open in Broadcasting Stations, Talking Picture and Sound Experts in great demand. And now Television is on the way! Soon there'll be a demand for thousands of Trained Men in this one branch alone.

Say "good-bye" to $25 and $35 a week—get into Radio, where thousands of jobs are open, paying $60 a week and up.

Not By Correspondence

By Actual Work—in 8 Weeks

Come to Coyne and learn Radio in 8 weeks! NOT BY BOOKS OR CORRESPONDENCE, but by actual Radio work on actual Radio equipment — on scores of Radio receivers, huge Broadcasting equipment, the very latest Television transmitters, Code Practice apparatus, Talking Picture and Sound equipment, etc. No experience needed. You learn all branches of Radio in 8 weeks.

FREE EMPLOYMENT SERVICE

After you graduate, I'll help you get the Radio Job you want — and if you need part-time work while at school, I'll help you get that, too. Coyne has been training men since 1899. Let Coyne train you for a Big Pay Radio job! Mail coupon below for a copy of my BIG FREE RADIO BOOK, telling all about Radio, Television, Talking Pictures, Wireless, etc. This costs you nothing. Just mail coupon below.

MAIL THIS COUPON FOR BIG FREE ELECTRICAL BOOK..

H. C. LEWIS, PRESIDENT
COYNE ELECTRICAL SCHOOL, Dept. 21-66
500 S. Paulina Street, Chicago, Illinois

Gentlemen: Please send me your big Free Electrical Book, with 151 illustrations. This does not obligate me.

Name.....

Address.....

City.....*State*.....

MAIL THIS COUPON FOR BIG FREE RADIO AND TELEVISION BOOK

H. C. LEWIS, PRESIDENT
RADIO DIVISION, COYNE ELECTRICAL SCHOOL
500 S. Paulina St., Dept. 21-8E, Chicago, Ill.

Gentlemen: Send me your Big Free Radio Book and all details of your Special Introductory Offer. This does not obligate me in any way.

Name.....

Address.....

City.....*State*.....

. . Here's *the* RADIO TRAINING *you've been waiting for*

Why envy the man who knows radio . . . who is able to assemble and repair fine sets . . . who knows the "why" and the "how," the theory and the practice of radio?

You, too, can learn about radio servicing, operating, radio telephony and telegraphy, broadcasting . . . radio in all its branches.

Learn at Home, in Your Spare Time

In order to make it easy for every man to study radio, RCA Institutes is now training men in every branch of radio . . . So that men can get this training at home in their spare time, or at any of the resident schools throughout the country.

The RCA Institutes complete Home Laboratory Training Course gives you thorough and reliable radio training. You progress easily, step by step, and you receive with your training the complete RCA Institutes' Laboratory equipment—a modern outlay of apparatus furnished to every student, enabling you to solve radio problems. This is the logical way for you to acquire in your spare time the commercial knowledge and ability required by the radio industry.

Home Training Course by America's Oldest and Foremost Radio Training Organization

This home training course and laboratory equipment are backed by more than twenty years' experience.

Send for this FREE BOOK Today!

Learn the facts about the radio industry . . . all about the opportunities in radio . . . about RCA Institutes and the staff of RCA Institutes instructors who train you. This book should be read by every ambitious man who wishes to train for the future. Forty pages of pictures and text. Describes in detail the training that has placed thousands of men in responsible positions in radio.

RCA INSTITUTES, Inc.

RCA INSTITUTES, Inc.
Dept. GN-2
75 Varick St., New York, N. Y.

Gentlemen: Please send me your FREE 40-page book which tells about the many opportunities in Radio and about your famous laboratory method of radio instruction at home.

Name ----------

Address ----------

Occupation ----------

Western LOVE Stories

Here's a magazine that holds the secret of eternal youth, the promise of a paradise on earth. For it gives you love stories of a land of youth and courage and brings to your own heart the joy of sweet memories.

It's a Clayton Magazine

20 cents on all newsstands

Why waste time on *old fashioned methods*

—when you can learn to play at home without a teacher

DON'T let the thought of long years of tiresome practice scare you away from learning to play! Don't let the thought of an expensive private teacher keep you from letting your dreams come true! For you—*anyone*—can easily *teach yourself* to play—right in your own home, in your spare time, and at only a fraction of what old, slow methods cost!

It's *so* easy! Just look at that sketch at the right. The note in the first space is *always* f. The note in the second space is *always* a. The way to know the notes that come in these four spaces is simply to remember that they spell *face.*

Now, isn't that simple? You don't have to know one note from another in order to begin. For the U. S. School way explains everything as *you go along*—both in print and picture—so that, almost before you know it, you are playing *real tunes and melodies* right from the notes.

You simply *can't go wrong.* First you are *told* what to do, then the picture *shows* you how to do it—then you do it yourself and *hear* it. No private teacher could make it any clearer.

Easy as A-B-C

No wonder over 600,000 men and women have learned to play this easy way! For this famous course is based on sound, fundamental musical principles, highly simplified. It's not a "trick" or "stunt" method. You learn to play from notes, just as the best musicians do. You learn to pick up any piece of music, read it, and understand it. No time is wasted on theories. *You get all the musical facts.* You get the real meaning of musical notation, time, automatic finger control, harmony.

You'll find yourself studying the U. S. School way with a smile. Your own home is your studio. The lessons come to you by mail. They consist of complete printed instructions, diagrams, all the music you need. There are no dry-as-dust exercises to struggle through. Instead, it's just like playing a game—you learn so fast!

Choose Your Course

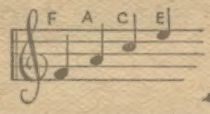
Piano	Piccolo
Organ	'Cello
Violin	Sight Singing
Drums and Traps	Ukulele
Guitar	Hawaiian Steel Guitar
Mandolin	Clarinet
Harp	Flute
Cornet	Saxophone
Trombone	

Voice and Speech Culture
Harmony & Composition
Automatic Finger Control
Piano Accordion
Italian and German Accordion
Banjo (Plectrum, 5-String or Tenor)
Juniors' Piano Course

No Talent Needed

Forget the old-fashioned idea that you need "talent." Just read the list of instruments in the panel, decide which one you want to play, and the U. S. School of Music will do the rest. And remember—no matter which instrument you choose, the cost in each case will average just the same—only a few cents a day.

Easy as A-B-C



If you can read the alphabet you can learn to play your favorite instrument *in just a few months.*

You'll never regret having learned to play. For those who can entertain with music at parties—who can snap up things with peppy numbers—are always sought after, always sure of a good time! Start *now* and surprise your friends!

Free Book and Demonstration Lesson

"Music Lessons in Your Own Home" is an interesting little book that is yours for the asking. With this free book we will send you a typical demonstration lesson that proves better than words, how quickly and easily you can learn to play your favorite instrument by note—in less than half the time and at a fraction of the cost of old, slow methods—the U. S. School way. The booklet will also tell you all about the amazing new *Automatic Finger Control.*

If you really want to play—if new friends, good times, social popularity, and increased income appeal to you—clip and mail the coupon NOW. Instruments supplied when needed, cash or credit. U. S. SCHOOL OF MUSIC, 3692 Brunswick Bldg., New York City.

U. S. SCHOOL OF MUSIC
3692 Brunswick Building, New York City

Please send me your free book, "Music Lessons in Your Own Home," with introduction by Dr. Frank Crane, Free Demonstration Lesson, and particulars of your easy payment plan. I am interested in the following course—

Have you .....instrument? .....

Name .....

Address .....

City ..... State.....

For a New Thrill

Read—

ASTOUNDING STORIES

The Magazine of Science Fiction

STORIES OF INVISIBILITY,
THE FOURTH DIMENSION,
TIME TRAVELING, INTER-
PLANETARY ADVENTURE,
ETC.

Twenty Cents *At All Newsstands*

A-H&CB

Broadcasting stations need trained men continually for jobs paying $1,800 to $5,000 a year.

Television—the coming field of many great opportunities—is covered by my course.

Operators on ships see the world and get good pay plus expenses.

Aviation is needing more and more trained Radio men. Operators employed through the Civil Service Commission earn $2,000 to $2,600 a year.

Talking Movies—an invention made possible only by Radio—offers many fine jobs to well trained Radio men.

You'll Get *Thrills*-Adventure BIG PAY in RADIO

I will Train You at Home to Fill a Fascinating Job in Radio

Radio's Amazing Growth is Opening Hundreds of Big Jobs Every Year

You like action, romance, thrills! You'll get them in Radio—plenty of them! Big pay, too. That is why I urge you to mail the coupon below for my free book of startling facts on the variety of fascinating, money-making opportunities in this great, uncrowded field. It also explains how you can quickly become a Radio expert—a Certified RADIO-TRICIAN—through my amazingly simple 50-50 method of home-study training. Thousands of men who knew absolutely nothing about Radio before taking my course are today making real money in this growing industry.

Thrilling Jobs That Pay $50 to $100 a Week

There are plenty of good jobs in Radio that pay $50, $75 and up to $100 a week. For instance, you can see the world in grand style as a Radio operator on shipboard. There are many splendid openings in this line with good pay plus your expenses. You'll also find thrills and real pay in Aviation Radio work. Broadcasting is another field that offers big pay and fascinating opportunities to men who know Radio. And think of the great, thrilling future for men with Radio Training in Television and Talking Movies. A Radio sales and service business of your own is another money-making opportunity I train you for.

Earn While You Learn

You stay right at home, hold your job, and learn in your spare time. (Lack of high school education or Radio experience are no drawbacks.) I teach you to begin making money shortly after you enroll. My new practical method makes this possible. I give you eight big laboratory outfits that teach you to build and service practically every type of receiving set made. Many of my students earn $15, $20, $30 weekly while learning. Earle Cummings, 18 Webster St., Haverhill, Mass., writes: "I made $375 in one month in my spare time, installing, servicing, selling Radio sets."

Get My Free Book

Send the coupon below for my 64-page book of opportunities in Radio and information on my home-study training. It has put hundreds of fellows on the road to bigger pay and success. I back my training with a signed agreement to refund every penny of your money if, after completion, you are not satisfied with the Lesson and Instruction Service I give you. Fill in and mail the coupon NOW!

J. E. SMITH, Pres.,
Dept. 1BM
National Radio Institute,
Washington, D. C.

Travelled 75,000 Miles

"Dear Mr. Smith: I have worked as Junior Operator on board S. S. Dorchester and Chief Operator of the Chester Sun. I have travelled from 75,000 to 100,000 miles, visited ports in various countries, fished and motored with millionaires, been on airplane flights, etc. I am now with Broadcasting Station WREN." (Signed) Robin D. Compton, 1213 Vermont St., Lawrence, Kansas.

$400 a Month

"The Radio field is getting bigger and better every year. I have made more than $400 each month and it really was your course that brought me to this." J. G. Dahlstead, 1134 So. 15th St., Salt Lake City, Utah.

Employment Service to all Graduates

Act Now

Mail Coupon Today

J. E. SMITH, President
National Radio Institute, Dept. 1BM
Washington, D. C.

Dear Mr. Smith: Send me your book, "Rich Rewards in Radio." I understand this places me under no obligation and that no salesman will call.

NAME.....

ADDRESS.....

CITY.....STATE.....

$8 Extra Each Night for Reikane
Over $1000 Extra for Scarbro

YOU, too, Can Make Many Friends and EASY, EXTRA MONEY *Quick* with the HAWAIIAN GUITAR

Look what Roy Reikane, Muir, Pa., writes: "Didn't know a note when I started Hawaiian Guitar. But it was easy to learn your way. Began making more friends right away. Now going strong; have been making $5 to $6 every evening and now have contract with theatre at $8.00 per night. Have made over $200 in 1½ months." Then read this from Carlton E. Scarbro, Fitzpatrick, W. Va.: "Your Course and Service can't be beat. They're easy, understandable and full of help. Have become very popular since learning. Have played at opera houses and many parties—all told have made $1,000 through your wonderful Course."

Learn to Play the Real Hawaiian Way--*Quick*--Right at Home in Only 1 to 3 Months' Spare Time

No previous musical training necessary; no long tiresome hours of practising. The New York Academy of Music's amazing Hawaiian Guitar Course can teach you right at home, in 1 to 3 months' spare-time, to play this rich, melodious, romantic instrument. Every step is made clear and easy; progress is rapid yet training is thorough. It's like play to learn this pleasant, fascinating way.

Makes $200 in Spare-Time

"Had only finished my 7th lesson when I played at a Ball and made my first Five Dollars. Have made almost $200 with my Hawaiian Guitar in spare-time."—John B. McMullin, Cadet, Mo.

Paid $8 for 4 Hours

"When I enrolled with you I didn't know one string from another. With first lesson, learned notes in just a few hours. Played first piece second evening. Now have plenty of good times and friends. Am making $8.00 per evening for just 4 hrs. playing at dances."—Granville M. Smith, Mohawk, Oregon.

Popular Radio Artist

"Your Course is easy! Knew nothing of music before taking it, but now can play any piece. Have been broadcasting over Station KVOO—have all the engagements I can fill—and am popular. Couldn't ask for more."—Floyd Price, Hulbert, Okla.

Special Demonstration Phonograph Records Included

We supply everything you need. With your very first lesson you receive FREE of extra cost a beautiful, rich-tone, genuine Hawaiian Guitar worth $20 at any store—Kno-All Chart—complete Outfit of tuner, picks, etc., etc.—clear, easy instruction—and specially made Demonstration Phonograph Records in which Robert Yap, the famous Native Hawaiian, correctly plays each piece in the Course. No effort is spared—no stone left unturned—to help YOU become an expert and accomplished player quick.

No Need to Wait for All the Fun and All the Money You Want—Get this FREE BOOK *Now!*

Here is the revealing Book that has shown thousands of others the way to make good with the Hawaiian Guitar. The book that has meant hundreds and hundreds of dollars—and dozens and dozens of new friends—for people who were right in your shoes just a few months ago. Yet you are welcome to a copy absolutely FREE. Learn at once how YOU can quickly get in line for plenty of fun, friends and EXTRA MONEY. It costs you nothing to find out. The big book explains everything, proves everything. The coupon below brings your FREE copy. Mail it today!

Get this **FREE BOOK** *Now!*

Radio's Most Popular Instrument

Broadcasting Stations the country over are eager for Hawaiian Guitarists. The public demands this stirring, unique music. Radio is only one of many opportunities for the Hawaiian Guitarist to win popularity and prosperity *quick!* Our students have gained wide-spread reputations and are paid handsomely.

Big Money for You Full Time or Spare-Time

Our students learn to cash in quick. Playing in either an amateur or professional way, many make anywhere from $15 extra money to $100 full-time pay each week. We show you how to turn pleasure into profit—turn music notes into bank notes! Our FREE Book explains every step. Get it at once!

Clip - Sign - Send

A. F. Bloch, President,
Hawaiian Studios 51021 of
NEW YORK ACADEMY OF MUSIC,
100 Fifth Ave., New York City.

Dear Mr. Bloch: Please send me at once your FREE Book, "How to Learn Hawaiian Guitar," showing me how to have popularity and Big Pay QUICK.

Name .....Age.....

Address .....

City and State .....

THE DAY'S WORK

By Bob McCormick

LIKE a lash in his face whips a tiger-tooth gale,
As out from his camp rides Patrolman McPhail.
Sand haze shrouds the hills where the Border trail runs—
There the Chink-smugglers cross with their aliens—and guns.

This day, even jackrabbits bide in the hole,
And men seek warm firesides. The Border Patrol
Sits hunched in the saddle, out riding the line,
And under his leg rides his trusty carbine.

One hour in the sand blizzard crossing the flat;
One hour topping ridges. . . . "Whoa, pony! What's that?"
Patrolman McPhail reins up quickly to look:
Half haze-hidden, down at a long gully's crook,
Man movement he spies and its meaning he reads
As down like a wolf from the ridge-top he speeds.

Of the six alien-smugglers, three turn in swift flight;
Of the six, three await him, guns ready for fight.

And now like a panther McPhail closes in,
A challenge of shots signals him to begin—
To begin here, lonehanded, a battle of lead
That may leave him victor—or may leave him dead.
The whine of glanced bullets chants weird harmony
As, crouching, he fires when the sand lets him see.

Gray sand and grim battle. . . . At setting of sun,
Two smugglers escape him. McPhail captures one—
A lawless, wild Yaqui, Juan Rojos, who's known
Along the whole Border as one of hell's own.

Patrolman McPhail brings his man into camp,
Then writes his report by a kerosene lamp.

For seven long hours of blue hell on his beat,
Patrolman McPhail turns in one single sheet;
Just seven brief words in his hand-writing fine:
"Apprehended one alien while riding the Line."

"WHISKEY-NOSE" HICKS—BRIDGE BUILDER

By Ray Nafziger

Missus Bill Benz has an idea to hold a pageant in honor of a run-down bridge what only Mexicans dare to use. And, if you call a pageant a fast, splashing float down the river, with a sudden end waiting for you down at the gorge, then that there pageant is sure-ly held right. But then anything except nothing can happen in Quiveras County, especially to our old friends, the Hooker Bros.

IT used to be here in the West if you tangled with trouble, it was only because you went out huntin' for it. Just like if your bronc steps in a dog hole, it's account you rode where dog holes was. But nowadays, you don't have to hunt for no trouble; it rides right up to your door—the wimmen see to that.

Anyway, that's the way it stacks up here in Canyon Lobo where me—Johnny Hooker—and my coot li'l' brother Stevie pardners it raisin' cows, sort of actin' as matrimonial agents between a bunch of registered Pale Face bulls and a herd of grade cows, and sellin' the offsprings in Kansas City at ten cents per pound to be cut up in fancy steaks what people pays forty and fifty cents per pound for.

Me and Stevie and our three cowhands, Pablo and One-ton and Old George, we're settin' down to the beef and beans this evenin' after a hard day ridin' the canyons and mesas, just relaxed peaceful with nothin' on but undershirts, britches and boots, account the heat, and scoopin' in food industrious from the trough when we hear a car drive up and a hail from the outside.

"You in there, Johnny Hooker!" I hears a female sing out in a voice what it's easy t' reckernize belongs to the hobble and side line and harness and cowbell our neighbor rancher Bill Benz had buckled onto him for life. Shades of a mule skinner, but that Missus Bill Benz sure has got a voice! A voice as big as all outdoors. She wouldn't never need to hire no hall to talk in—a hall would cramp her style.

And not only has she got a voice, but she's one of these pestiferous females what uses it night and day, principally to start up something. Her bein' one of these fool wimmen what's not satisfied with things as they lay.

but is always stirrin' up some fool fandango, liftin' the lid off the Dutch oven to smell the beans and meanwhile gittin' a load of ashes and a peck of dust in 'em.

"Hey, you, Johnny!" she bawls, when I don't answer.

"Tell 'er I ain't home," I begs the rest of the boys.

"Johnny ain't home, Missus Benz," yells out One-ton.

"You're a liar!" she hollers back. "You, Johnny Hooker, come out here. And pronto! I want to talk to you! And you come out, too, Stevie. All of you come out o' there: I got business with you."

"Tell her I'm sick in bed," I tells the boys, and that ain't far off the truth, as I know if I ain't sick now, I will be after I git roped in on any business of Missus Bill Benz's. But bein' sick in bed wouldn't keep that female from gittin' you into something anyway, so I puts my shirt back on and me and Stevie and One-ton and Pablo and Old George steps out the door. Besides Missus Benz in the car is the school marm from the Blancocito district, Miss Ophelia Buskey.

"Why, howdy, Missus Benz," I greets her, as I hustles out. "I'm sorry, but I got to run right on. The dam above our alfalfa is about to bust out, and I got to hurry on up and—"

"You stay here, Johnny Hooker," orders Missus Benz, hog-tyin' me with a look from a pair of eyes what's chillier than liquid air. "Let that dam go out; I and Miss Buskey here got something important to powwow with you boys about."

"Yes, indeed," chirps up Miss Ophelia Buskey.

School marms they got a reputation for bein' mighty nice, and a lot are, but the she-boss of this Blancocito district ain't no inspiration to nothin' except hard likker. She's one of these long-nose, stern-eyed, snooty kind what thinks cowboys is two degrees lower'n Mexican section hands. She's sort o' the official poet of Quiveras County. She's published a poetry book called "Songs of Adobe Land" and them songs is clear the same way as adobe mud is.

"You all remember Major Homer Hicks, don'tcha?" Missus Benz addresses us.

"You mean that old loafin' crook of a 'Whiskey-nose' Hicks that uset to be round here?" I says t' her. "Sure, we remember him, the cold-deckin' son of a goat. The biggest liar that ever spit at a crack. He was the feller that claimed he dug the Mississippi Valley and throwed the dirt over to make the Rockies."

"It was a lucky day for Quiveras County when that loud mouth pulled his picket pin and lit out for another range," puts in my brother Stevie. "And lucky for him—with all the ropes they is hangin' on saddles in Quiveras County."

"I won't hear to no such slanderin' of a great man like Major Hicks," Missus Benz says, snortin' out fire. "If not for brave Major Hicks, this Quiveras County would still be a wilderness inhabited by Indians, prairie dogs and outlaws. Instead of bein' filled with fine schools and churches and liberries and a sheriff and law and order. And to what does all this civilization date back to?" she inquiries.

"Yes, to what does it all date back to?" says Miss Ophelia Buskey.

"Well, the time them Squaw Crick cattlemen strung up them seven rustlers by the neck was a sort of startin' point for a lot o' civilization," I says.

"Wrong!" Missus Bill Benz orates. "The great day when civilization may have been said to have lit and built her nest in Quiveras County was the day gallant Major Hicks built that log bridge over the Rio Blanco."

"Is that so?" I says, plumb astonished. That old log bridge over the Blanco River, which is nothin' but a crick anyway, is only a li'l rickety affair about twenty feet long. The Mex'cans in the town of Rosario use it to haul a few jags of beans and squaw

corn to the railroad over it occasional. "Is that so?" I repeats perlite.

"Yes, that's so," she snaps. "The Patriotic Native Daughters of the Southwest, of which I am president, has been studyin' the hist'ry of Quiveras County, and we decided the buildin' of that bridge was the first step in bringin' civilization here. And what we come here for to announce," goes on Missus Benz, "is that the Patriotic Native Daughters of the Southwest is goin' to put up a plack—"

"An inscribed bronze tablet," puts in Miss Buskey, sorta learned-like, as she sees we don't know what a plack is. "It's spelled 'P-L-A-Q-U-E,'" she says, probably givin' it the French way of spellin' it.

"And we're goin' to put up a plack on that log bridge over the Rio Blanco to commemorate the buildin' of the bridge by Major Hicks and his brave band of settlers fifty-five years ago," finishes Missus Benz.

I don't see no way they can drag us in, as I wouldn't even know a plack or plaque if I saw it. But still I ain't takin' no chancets.

"Ain't that fine?" I says rapid. "Yes, it's sure fine to honor a old coot like Whiskey-nose Hicks. *Mil gracias* for tellin' us the news, and now we'll be dashin' along to fix that dam."

"Yuh'll dash nowhere's," says Missus Bill Benz. "We ain't done. When we're puttin' up the plack, we're goin' to hold a pageant."

"A pageant," repeats Miss Ophelia Buskey for our benefit. "It's spelled 'P-A-G-E-A-N-T.' It's a sort o' play."

"And Major Hicks has promised to come from California as guest of honor of the Patriotic Native Daughters of the Southwest for the ceremony," goes on Missus Benz. "Miss Buskey has written a poetic pageant, and you boys are to be in it."

"We are in a pig's eye," I starts to say, but don't. "I'm sorry, Missus Benz," I tells her. "But we has arranged on that day to go over to git a bunch of cattle from Jake Haller."

"What day yuh gittin' those cows?" she snaps.

"Why, the same day you're puttin' up this plack and holdin' this pageant," I tells her.

"I ain't told yuh no date yet," she says severe. "Don't try to crawfish; you cowboys are down for this ceremony. You're takin' part in this great pageant Miss Buskey has wrote to represent the comin' of Major Hicks and his brave settlers to Quiveras County and the building of this historic old bridge over the Rio Blanco. My husband Bill is takin' the part of Major Hicks. And don't let me hear no more calf bellerin' outa you. You boys show up at our ranch tomorrow night for a rehearsal."

So them two females drive off, and I throws my hat on the ground and stomps on it. Gone is the good old-fashioned days when wimmen raised 12 or 14 childern and chopped the fire wood and made underwear in their spare time instead of sashayin' around stirrin' up things like these here pageants. Them was the days a man wouldn't be pushed into anything except maybe a li'l' booze or poker party, and if the wimmen folks got took to a dance once a year they was tickled to death.

It would seem easy to git out of this fool pageant and plack-tackin' by stayin' away, if it was anybody else except Missus Bill Benz. Not, of course, that she scares me and Stevie and Oneton and Pablo and Old George none whatever. As it is of course simply ridiculous that five husky, case-hardened, wind-bit, leather-necked, iron-jawed, rawhide and bobwire men like us would cringe away from no female. We ain't the kind to be bulldozed into no fool cellerbration in honor of Whiskey-nose Hicks. Hell, Missus Bill Benz don't own this country or us; we're free, white and over 21, ain't we?

Yes, we ain't. So the next night we shows up at the Benz ranch and that Miss Buskey school marm is there with the p-a-g-e-a-n-t she has writ all

rolled up and tied around with a ribbon. And old Bill Benz and his cowboys and a bunch of other ranchers is there, brought in necked to their wives, although with their forefeet braced and bellerin' stubborn to the last step.

"Hyah, brave Major Hicks!" I yells at Bill Benz who's to take the leadin' rôle.

"I've been hoorawed enough a'ready about that," he warns me. "Don't you try to kid me too, Johnny."

Them wimmen herd us out on the lawn on which they got a lot o' car lights shinin' and Miss Ophelia Buskey explains the pageant.

"The ceremony is to be at the bridge," she orates. "And we're goin' t' present for the spectators the comin' of Major Hicks and the first settlers to Quiveras County and their buildin' of the old bridge over the Rio Blanco. You men are to perform the action while I read the poem. At various times I will pause, and you will portray the activities of the major's party. Now, at the start of the pageant, you will be fifty yards from the bridge with your horses and your axes and your hoes. I will be standing on the bridge reading my poem to the crowd. When Missus Benz raises her hand the first time as signal, you will approach the bridge afoot with your hoes and axes on your shoulders. Then you will all stand on the bank and shade your eyes with your hands and look over the river. Now, Missus Benz, let's get the rehearsal started: we will explain it all as we go along."

So Missus Bill Benz she hazes us back a ways and we stay close herded while Mrs. Buskey clears her throat and unrolls that pageant and busts out into something which I remember runs something like this:

"Here stood the untrod wilderness primevil,
The lovely dales and dells of our fair county, Quiveras;
Here in primative majesty towered the sky-kissin' hemlocks,
The giant-branched sycamores and the magnificent chestnuts—"

"What kind of a country is she talkin' about?" I asks Bill Benz puzzled. "I never heard of no such trees in here—nothin' but cottonwood and scrub pine and cedar."

"Nope," agrees Bill. "Nor no dales or dells neither. Nothin' but arroyos and flats and a few mesas."

"Psst!" hisses Missus Bill Benz stern at us, and Miss Buskey reads on:

"Here through the pathless virgin forest,
Marched brave Major Hicks and his gallant comrades,
Into the green valley of the Rio Blanco,
Carryin' their hoes and axes and rifles,
Eyes a-gleam, hearts aflame, feet eager,
To build new homes in the primevil wilderness.

"And here," she tells us, "Bill Benz and the rest of you cowboys will talk to each other and nod your heads approvin' and act joyful over seein' the green valley of the Rio Blanco."

"Actin' joyful over seein' that valley is goin' to be hard," my li'l' brother Stevie remarks. "Squaw Flat acrost the bridge ain't green; it's nothin' but a desert."

"Psst! Psst!" Missus Bill Benz hisses our way. "Shake hands, you hombrays! Express joy!"

We does it, and that female unrolls a few more yards of that poem and reads it while we gits handed more directions from time to time. That pageant stacks up for a hard afternoon's work. We got to go through all the motions of buildin' that fool log bridge, pertendin' to be cuttin' down trees and draggin' them cussed trees to the river bank and hewin' 'em into timbers. After which we got to pertend to lay 'em acrost the stream and spike 'em together. And all for

what? Why, to honor this old fake of a Whiskey-nose Hicks.

I falls asleep near the end, but Missus Bill Benz shakes me awake so I can act with the rest in lookin' down satisfied at the great bridge us and Major Hicks has built.

Missus Benz and these Patriotic Native Daughters of the Southwest ain't satisfied; they rehearse us again while we sweats swingin' our axes to chop down imaginary trees to drag them trees over to the river, all to illustrate Miss Buskey's poem.

"Why not rebuild the dang bridge while goin' through all them motions?" I suggests. "That bridge never looked too strong to me anyway."

"Psst!" says Missus Benz at me, and she tells us we can go home. We got to show up for two more rehearsals, and a week later we're to be in town to greet Whiskey-nose Hicks when his train pulls in. On the day after that is to be the ceremony out at the bridge.

It's rainin' when Major Hicks' train pulls in, and all the school childern in town is lined up to receive him with flags in their hands. When the train toots in, that fake of a Whiskey-nose Hicks appears on the platform with his red nose a dozen shades redder than it was when he left this country. He's about eighty years old, and dressed up in a outlandish costume of a black velvet Mexican jacket with a red sash and bell-bottom pants and a white sombrero big enough to use for a stable. Them little school childern they all bursts into a song which was also written by this poetic Miss Ophelia Buskey, and they waves their flags while the crowd busts into a cheer. This old Hicks he soaks it all in pleased and makes a speech from the platform while we stands in the rain.

To hear him brag, you'd think he built the whole town of Sunset brick by brick and started all the cow ranches. He talks about "my people" and "my town," and he registers a complaint why they didn't name the county after him.

That night there's a big banquet with a dozen speeches by lawyers and wimmen, and by the time they're done gabbin', Whiskey-nose Hicks is 'way above Custer and that little feller of a Kit Carson what's buried over at Taos, and Zebulon Pike and a dozen others. Which is sure a lot o' praise to git for havin' throwed up a two-by-four log bridge which we're certain Whiskey-nose didn't do no work on hisself; he set in the shade and bossed the job. And it wasn't no good bridge anyway; them Mex'cans that use it has to keep patchin' that bridge to keep it from fallin' in. Anyway, they don't need no bridge there, as anybody what can ford a stream can ford the Blanco easy, except after a hard rain.

That night it rains some more, and the next day we got to go out in still more rain to where this li'l' log bridge sticks up over the river. The Rio Blanco is up high and wide, and the water is just about up to the bridge floor. On one side the Mex ranchers has a waggin loaded up with wheat to show the passin' of the harvest over the bridge, while us settlers with our saddle and pack horses is on the other side ready to bring civilization into the country. They got the plack all ready to nail up on a post at one end, and a big crowd is on hand to see the show.

Whiskey-nose Hicks he's not takin' no part in the pageant; he's settin' under a umbrella, swelled up like a bloated cow's belly. Miss Ophelia Buskey is dresed in a white robe, with a crown of scrub oak leaves around her head, while Missus Benz is in white also, reppersentin' Columbia with a crown also on her head.

The pageant she starts pitchin' with Miss Buskey readin' off her poem while Missus Benz raises her hand to indicate us settlers is to approach. We come up to the bank of the river, led by Bill Benz as Major Hicks, in a Civil War uniform three inches too short for him. So accordin' to directions, we shade our eyes with our hands and look across the stream. We don't

strain our eyes none, as the stream is about wide enough to spit across anyway, although today she's spread out from the rain and foamin' along.

There's some more readin' and Missus Benz raises her hand commandin' and we goes back and pertends to be cuttin' down trees. Some of the men in the crowd watchin' they begins to snicker, but Missus Bill Benz and the other wimmen freeze 'em with a look.

The pageant goes on with Ophelia readin' that poem and us workin' in the rain, buildin' that bridge, and Whiskey-nose settin' under the umbreller lappin' it all up pleased as a old cow tastin' new grass in spring. We git it done fin'ly, and then the waggin of wheat moves onto the bridge. The feller gits the plack ready to nail up on the bridge as soon as the waggin is acrost, and the crowd what's stood on the bank shoves in close.

They got a big load of wheat on and with the high water, the bridge she creaks and sorta shivers.

"Hey!" Bill Benz yells. "Back that dang load of wheat offa there."

So they yells at the horses and the waggin backs off of there, but this don't stop the ceremonies. Miss Buskey she reads the climax of the perceedin's, reelin' off these touchin' lines, which is to be follered by the plack-tackin'.

"Hail to thee, brave Major Hicks!
Hail to thee, bold, blithe spirit,
Builder of this sturdy bridge over the Blanco,
Hewed from strong timbers; built to stand eternally,
To span forever these broad waters,
Hail to thee, Pioneer Bridge Builder!"

So the men steps forward to nail the plack on the side of the bridge when all a-sudden there comes a sharp crack.

"Say, this looks dangerous to me," I remarks, happenin' to be standin' close to Missus Benz and Ophelia and Whiskey-nose near the middle of the bridge.

"Psst!" says Missus Bill Benz, glarin' at me.

There's another crack, and all a-sudden that bridge begins to settle down. Everybody starts to hightail it offa that bridge, but me and Whiskey-nose and Missus Benz and the school marm is too far from the end. The part o' the bridge we're on sinks down and the water comes up to our knees and then the whole bridge just goes all to pieces.

I makes a grab for a section of floor logs that has busted free in a sort o' raft and lands on it. As the logs travels downstream I hear a yelp beside me and there is that school marm with her white dress all soaked up with muddy water, screechin' for help. I reach down an drags her up beside me.

"Hail to thee, bold, blithe spirit," I says to cheer her up, but Ophelia don't say nothin'—just keeps a-yellin'.

Then I hear another beller for help on the other side of me, and there comes Missus Bill Benz straddlin' a log which she has caught hold of.

That school marm is hangin' around my neck until she is near to chokin' me to death, but I busts loose from her and reaches down to bring up Missus Benz. I lay down flat and grabs Missus Bill Benz's hands and tries to drag her aboard.

Missus Benz is hefty as a Hereford cow, and she all but pulls me into the water, but fin'ly I gits one foot and leg outa the water, after which I manages to haul the rest of her up on the raft. She's mad as a hen and streamin' water, while her teeth is goin' like a Juarez Spanish dancer's castanets.

The current's kind o' swift, and we start shootin' along real lively on those logs. Everytime the raft dips, Miss Buskey grabs me on one side around the neck, and Missus Benz on the other. I got one comfort: I won't drown to death; if the raft busts up, Miss Buskey and Missus Benz will choke me t' death first.

"I never knowed anything a Hooker

was in yet," Missus Benz says to me soon's she gits her breath, "but what something didn't happen."

"I s'pose I'm to blame for this bridge goin' down," I says sort o' sarcastic.

"I'll bet anyway if you hadn't been here it wouldn't of happened," she tells me.

"I sure wish I'd 'a' got a chance to prove that," I remarks, "by bein' ten miles away from here."

"Help, save me! He-e-elp!" this schoolmarm is yippin' to the crowd back of us. "Help! Save me!"

"Why not make it for the three of us while you're at it?" I asks her. "Calm down. Drownin' is a nice romantic way for a poet to die."

"Hangin' would be more fittin'!" says Missus Benz sour. "If not for her wantin' to read that poem, this would never of happened."

Part of that crowd on the bank just stands and yells horrified, and part runs along the shore. Some of the smarter ones, includin' my li'l' coot brother Stevie and a coupla other cowboys they climbs horses and gallops down after us.

Just then at the side I can hear some more yells from the water and there comes old Major Whiskey-nose, belly down on a log, and paddlin' with his hands and yawlin' loud for help.

"What's the matter with that courageous old settler?" I says. "What's the matter with that fearless, bold blithe spirit what never knowed the meanin' of fear?"

He heads his log for our raft and when it bams into us it a'most tears the planks apart and sinks us. I drags him up with us by his whiskers, and there we are—all four of us settin' on a few logs what's spiked together. We've traveled over a quarter of a mile down the river which is foamin' along, and I know that not very far ahead is a sort of a gorge with walls about fifteen foot high. That gets me worried, as there are a lot of rocks in there, and this raft of ours is liable to hit them rocks and just disappear. And how am I goin' to climb a fifteen foot bank with them people clingin' affectionate to my neck?

"What are you goin' to do about this, Johnny Hooker?" Missus Bill Benz demands of me. "I'll ketch my death of cold out here."

"You don't need to worry about ketchin' no death of cold," I reassures her, thinkin' of that gorge ahead. "But what would you suggest I should do?" I inquires. "If you ask me, I'd say throw off this old pioneer what built that bridge so bum it went down under a big load of wheat."

My coot li'l' brother Stevie he lopes alongside of us along the bank and he's swingin' a rope and hollerin' to me to grab one end and tie it to the logs we're on. He figures his pony can hold us against the current, and keep us from goin' down the li'l' gorge below.

That rope of his comes whistlin' through the air and I miss it the first time and Missus Bill Benz and Major Hicks and Ophelia cusses me out for a awkward goof. Stevie throws that rope ag'in and this time I snags it and ties it around a li'l' stub of log that's stickin' up.

Stevie as he lopes his nag along the bank takes his dallies and then turns his horse. The bank's plumb slippery from the rain that's fell and as he swings his pony, the current sorta grabs us and gives a jerk on the rope. Stevie's horse is passin' over a slick spot and the pull on the rope is too much; all a-sudden we have the treat of seein' my li'l' brother Stevie and his horse flyin' off the side of that bank and ploppin' into the water with a big splash.

It's a lucky thing Stevie leaves his saddle on the way and lands out of reach of the hoofs of that horse, for that bronc is sure a-kickin' after he hits that water. The rope comes off the horn and there we are, still floatin' along toward the gorge with Stevie and the pony in the river also. I drags in the rope which is still tied to the log on the raft, figgerin' mebbe I can

throw it ashore if some other rider comes along to grab it.

After that things begin to happen kinda fast around that Rio Blanco. Stevie he's a good swimmer, and he manages to git back to shore. His horse also strikes out for shore, but the current carries him close to us. I leans over to grab his bridle, but misses it. As he swings for the bank, I does the only thing I can do: I hops off the raft carryin' the loose end of the rope and grabbin' the pony's tail, lettin' him haul me to the bank.

"You coward!" calls the school teacher after me. "You would ride off and leave us here to drown."

The raft gits caught in a li'l' eddy, and while it's still whirling around, me and that nag gets to the bank. Then I runs along that bank, still holdin' the end of the rope, and wrops it around the first tree stump I come to. And there's the raft all tied up safe and all we got to do is wait till enough men come down to pull it ashore.

Well, after a masterly piece of work and quick thinkin' like that on my part, you'd expect mebbe there'd be a sorta cellerbration held in my honor by the Patriotic Daughters of the Southwest, and even a bronze plack tellin' of my bravery maybe tacked on the stump where I tied that rope, and even a pageant and a poem, but things don't happen that way in Quiveras County. You got to be eighty years old or dead to be a hero here.

Them two females Missus Benz and Miss Buskey and Whiskey-nose when they gits ashore, they're as mad as they're wet. That white robe around that tall school marm clings close and wrops her about like a wet sheet around a telegraph pole. And Missus Bill Benz she's still blamin' me for the whole thing and castin' dirty remarks at her husband Bill for not jumpin' into the stream and savin' her as a husband is s'posed to do.

The pageant and ceremony seems ended as there's no bridge left to tack the plack on. They hustles Whiskey-nose into a auto and he gits on the first train out, bellerin' he's goin' to sue the Patriotic Native Daughters of the Southwest for damages to his health.

Anyway, it shuts up them Patriotic Native Daughters for a while, and anyone would think that that would be the end of it. And anywhere but in Quiveras County it would be. Here nothin' is ended until you're planted with a tombstone bloomin' at your head.

Me and Stevie are no sooner back home than Sheriff Andy Causey and and the three county commissioners calls on us.

"What you boys goin' to do about that log bridge you wrecked?" they asks us.

"We might offer a reward for its return," I says. "What would you suggest we should do about it? And, if anything, why?"

"It was the fault of this pageant that bridge went out," they got the gall to tell us. "If you hadn't overloaded it with that big waggin of wheat, it wouldn't of been washed away. Those Mex'cans are kickin', and it's up to the county to build another bridge for 'em. And we're holdin' you and Bill Benz and the rest that took part in that pageant responsible. Either put in a new bridge or we'll get a contractor to do it and make you pay the bill."

"Nix on that contractor," I tells 'em. "By the time you grafters all git your split on that bridge, we'd have all our ranches mortgaged. We'll build another piffling log bridge ourselfs."

So me and Stevie and One-ton and old George and Pablo we loads up a waggin with some tools and takin' some cowboys from Bill Benz's ranch, we goes over there and cuts some logs offa the mesa in back of the river and snakes 'em down to the bank to throw another dang bridge across the river. The banks has busted off durin' the flood and the river's considerable wider than it was before, and it's one hell of a job, with workin' in ice-cold water on top. We gits splinters in our hands

and ax callouses and our backs is full of cricks from sawin' and liftin', etc.

Me and Stevie we're bustin' our backs over a cross-cut saw slicin' a big log in two, when one of them Mex'cans what lives across the river comes up to us. It's old Pete Sepulveda, a loafer that grows a few beans over there.

"Hello, Johnny," he says. "I would like to say something to you, Johnny, if you've got time to lissen."

"I always got time to lissen when I'm workin' one end of a cross-cut saw," I tell him, and me and Stevie both straightens our backs and grunts.

"It's something important," Pete says mysterious. "This here Major Hicks he was s'posed to of built the log bridge here, wasn't he? That was one big mistake. It wasn't Major Hicks that built the bridge that went out. That bridge was built by the Mexicans that were livin' here, long before Major Hicks and the settlers came in."

"Yeah?" I asks. "So who did build this bridge?"

"It was built by my grandpapa," says old Pete sort o' proud. "By my grandpapa, Miguel Sepulveda. He and his neighbors built this bridge a long time before Major Hicks come in.

"And I think," Pete goes on, "that if there is a fiesta in honor of Major Hicks, they ought to hold a fiesta for my grandpapa, too. He is over a hunderd years old, and we could have a grand fiesta for him, with speeches and a big dance."

"Let's get this straight," I says to Pete, "You claim your grandfather built this bridge here. And it's your idee after all the trouble we had with that pageant and rebuildin' the bridge that we ought to hold a cellerbration in his honor just like we done for old Whiskey-nose Hicks?"

"That's it," Pete says, grinnin' wide.

"Do you hear that, Stevie?" I says to my li'l' coot brother.

"Yeah," says Stevie. So we both drop that saw and we jumps for Pete Sepulveda. We miss him and he gives a loud yell and jumps into the river splashin' across with me and Stevie after him. But we don't ketch him: he raises dust too fast outa there.

"We was dang fools, Stevie," I says. "We never thought of gittin' him with a gun."

So Stevie and me we bends our backs on that saw and draws 'er back and forth through that log, and if fifty years from now any organization of Patriotic Native Daughters of the Southwest wants to hold a plack-tackin' in our honor, Hooker Bros. is hereby announcin' they got to hogtie us first and snake us over to the ceremony with four big, strong horses.

IN THE NEXT ISSUE

MAN'S ESTATE

By James W. Egan

The Story of a Buck-wild Young Waddy

The First March ACE-HIGH Goes on the Newsstands, February 6th

THE SUN-TRAP AT SAGUARO

By George Rosenberg

Wh[illegible] is Larry Webb, a stalwart son of the range, now an outlaw with a price on his he[illegible] —and what is that desperate gleam in his eyes? These questions Marian asked herself. Even though she found no answer, she threw in all with this strange young man.

CHAPTER I

Ten Men Wait

LARRY WEBB, taut with worry, hoping against hope, stood waiting in the mouth of Renegade Canyon. Anxiously he peered north over the desert for sight of a familiar rider; anxiously he strained to catch the drum of swift-beating hoofs. But the night was weirdly quiet, and the dim light of a wan moon arching over the distant Morogones Range revealed nothing that moved on the sandy flats of Sundance Basin.

In Renegade Canyon, a couple dozen yards behind Larry, nine men slumped around a campfire. They also were waiting; sulky, in suspense, fuming with impatience, too worked-up to take things easy. They were restless as men under tension are restless; ahead of them was an ugly, dangerous job, and they fretted to get that task over and done with.

Each of the lean, hard-bitten riders wore two holsters, well forward and tied down. Their horses, ready for an instant getaway, were tethered in a nearby clump of mesquite, a rifle under the skirt of each saddle. Just now the fleet desert-bred mounts were taking advantage of this respite in their strenuous lives to jerk succulent screwbeans from the *tornillos* about them. Already they had traveled far, and it might be a long haul and a hard one before they would again have a chance to graze.

"Webb!" Buck Carson, leader of the gang, called out. "What in blue blazes is holdin' that brother of yours?"

"Nothin'," Larry answered loyally. "Ross will be tearin' up here in a couple shakes."

"Yeah! I bet that reckless son of a buzzard has stopped to play some woman!"

A hot retort surged to Larry's lips; but he checked it, realizing the danger just now of a quarrel with big Buck Carson, realizing, too, that his retort was prompted more by hate of the burly leader than by good and sufficient reason. Possibly Ross *had* run into some fancy woman on this scouting

trip; Ross Webb couldn't cross a street for a plug of tobacco without going clean around the block to pick up a handkerchief for some blonde. Larry idolized his older brother. However, Larry was too clear-sighted, too honest, to be blind to Ross's faults. Tall, stalwart, brawny shouldered Ross Webb was game to fight the devil and generous as a summer rain—but too reckless and full of frolic to think of his own hazardous business when a pair of lovely eyes invited. And lovely eyes often invited Ross Webb, Larry reflected, his mind full of misgivings.

The wind flung a clatter of pounding hoofs to Larry's ear.

"Here comes Ross!" he announced.

A change came over the gang. Promise of action livened up the men like a drink of forty rod. They rose to their feet, ready to break camp in a hurry. . . . A picked band of desperadoes, Carson's riders. Their keen eyes, hard cast of features, iron confidence of manner, showed them for men quick to think and swift to act, men indifferent to danger, indifferent to law or creed or right, gunfighters of deadly skill. Strong, rapacious, hard-boiled. Buck Carson, though, was harder boiled; when he spoke they laid back their ears and listened.

Swarthy, dark-eyed, black of hair, he ruled his pack by right of brute strength and a wily, restless brain. He was a huge man, Buck Carson, towering over his riders in height and power of build, with a body as graceful as a panther's for all his great frame.

Rising from the ground, he strode over to Larry now. And though Larry was just a shade under six feet and broad of shoulder, beside Carson he looked boyish and spindling.

Carson growled, "From the way Ross is spurrin' his bronc over the ground, he's got big news for us."

Ross Webb pounded up at a gallop, yanked his rangy gelding back on its haunches to a sliding stop, and leaped from the saddle. He nodded to Carson, flung an arm about Larry's shoulders, and stalked into th e circle of firelight. He was as tall as Carson and as brawny of muscle; but while the gang leader's face was dour and rugged and black with beard, Ross Webb's features were clean-cut and alert with humor.

"Here's the dope, men," he announced crisply. "Our trick's worked. Old Dobe Monahan has got thirty thousand in cash at his house, ready to pay us for that big herd of steers Carson promised to deliver tomorrow. Monahan don't know this herd is just imaginary, of course; he thinks Carson really has got all that beef to drive over. However, Monahan is foxy enough to guard against any hold-up tonight by pullin' off a stunt that'll make it hard for us to annex that money."

"Yeah?" Carson demanded, his dark eyes smoldering. "What's this stunt?"

"It's real cute. Monahan is holdin' a big barn dance tonight, an' he's invited every hombre within a day's ride of here."

Carson swore in disappointment, and a groan came from a couple of his quicker-witted men.

"See all the angles to this move?" Ross Webb prompted. "Every puncher, every cattleman, an' every barroom bum who can tear loose from his home corral is at this frolic tonight, all present an' accounted for, right under the eye of Dobe Monahan an' the sheriff. It's a cinch that none of *those* hombres will stick up the outfit an' get Monahan's money—too many folks watchin'. Besides, they all left their shootin'-irons at the door with the sheriff, like they always do at a sociable in this country. Monahan is guardin' his money by ridin' herd on every hombre who might steal it! Damned clever. . . . It's just too bad for Monahan that he don't know Buck Carson brought a gang into this territory!"

Monahan's strategy was funny to the men, and they guffawed at it; nevertheless, they pressed closer about Ross Webb and Carson, anxious to be told a way to get around Monahan's defense.

Carson, plainly worried, ran nervous fingers through his shock of black hair.

"Well, Ross?" he demanded, scowling. "How do we put the skids to Monahan?"

"Here's our program," Ross stated, talking with snap and decision. "That *baile* is bein' held in Monahan's big barn. Hard cider's flowin', fiddles scrapin', feet a-thumpin', gals laughin'. Nobody suspects trouble. Sheriff Neile an' three-four deputies are playin' poker in a front stall, an' in a box beside 'em are the shootin'-irons for the whole crowd."

"Where," Carson demanded, "is Monahan's thirty thousand?"

"The cash is in his safe, in the ranch house bedroom. Three Bar K riders are sleepin' in there—an' *they* are armed a-plenty."

"Then the deal is off!" Carson burst out. "Too damn much risk."

"Risk, hell!" Ross snapped. "We're goin' through with this play."

A flame surged into Carson's cheek, and he took one swift, terrible step toward Ross Webb. Larry, who had dropped back, instantly moved to his brother's side. But Ross pushed him away gently, and grinned at Carson.

"We love each other like dog wolves, don't we, Buck?" Ross taunted. "However, there's too much at stake for us to have a showdown now. Sometime, when the gang won't be hurt by a ruckus. Now listen to my plan."

A murmur of approval came from the other men. Carson heard, considered, and was wise enough to swallow his anger.

"All right," he growled. "Spit it out."

"Carson, you take four men and catfoot into the ranch house. Tie up the three guards; they're already half cocked on white mule. Then blow the safe an' get the money. . . . Meanwhile I'll join the party inside the barn. An' outside, two men will hide near the front door, an' two at the back. So if there's an alarm, an' when the safe blows with a bang, we'll flash our guns an' hold that crowd quiet while you find the money an' make a getaway. We'll paralyze the mob until you get a long head start. Then we'll burn the trail after you. Fair enough?"

"Say, Sheriff Neile an' his deputies will fight!"

"That's my lookout," Ross answered. "Don't worry about *that*, Carson. Fair enough?"

It was more than fair, Carson realized. Webb was taking the dangerous half of the job; the men with him were certain to run a gauntlet of bullets when escaping.

So grudgingly the burly leader admitted, "Plenty fair enough. You're takin' the big share of grief, Webb. Let's ride!"

CHAPTER II

Six-Gun Drums

MARIAN HAZLETT was in a quandary. The question at issue was no mere trifle of girlish whim, but an affair on which a couple of lives depended. Marriage was not a simple matter of picnic, paradise, or purgatory to Marian; it was a serious partnership. And she wanted to be positively sure about the other member of the firm before incorporating.

"No, Donald," she insisted, "there isn't another man, and I do think the world and all of you, and I *do* think Mrs. Donald Willis would be a name to be proud of, but—"

"But!" echoed Doc Willis wretchedly. "But *what?* I'm young. I'm popular. I'm not poor, nor bowlegged, and I don't stutter, and my face doesn't scare children—"

"Oh, Donald," she cut in quickly, "I didn't mean anything like *that* was the matter!"

"Then what is it? Heavens, girl, by this time your mind ought to be made up! You've known me ever since you came here to Tres Pinos to live with your Uncle John. And that's been—why, you left St. Louis three years ago!"

"That's just it," she confessed, miserably. Rising from the sofa, she wandered across the living room to the big fireplace and stared moodily into the white heart of the blazing pine logs. Doc Willis, his brown hair rumpled and a stricken look in his blue eyes, gazed appealingly after her; he was just thirty, and over his head and hands in love.

"After three years," Marian repeated, "I ought to know my own mind. I ought to be certain, *positive*, about how I feel toward you. But I'm not. . . . Oh, I'm terribly fond of you, Donald! You're one of my best habits. You're as nice and pleasant as sunshine; only—only, I'm afraid I wouldn't be happy with you. I'd fret and—be restless—or—"

She gazed at him pleadingly, begging him to understand what she was trying to say. Then she observed his look of pain and bewilderment. Impulsively she darted to him and flung her arms about his neck, kissed him.

She was like that; loath to cause hurt, swift to make amends. She was young, just turned twenty, slim and graceful as a young poplar in riding skirt and boots and snug leather jacket. Her profile was flawless, her face was a perfect oval, her skin fine and lustrous as marble, her legs slender and her arms soft and young. Silky chestnut hair, piled high on her head, caught the lamp gleams in a thousand bronzy sparkles. About her was something rare and buoyant, something more intangible than just rugged health—an added luster of keen good sense softened by humor and brightened with courage, coupled with a deep capacity for gentleness and sympathy.

Doc Willis released her from his embrace as a knock rattled the cabin door. He walked forward to answer.

Opening, he admitted an elderly puncher, the Bar K foreman. On the latter's face excitement burned like a red flare.

"Doc!" he sputtered. "There's been the dangdest ruckus! Three men killed, two more dyin', another with a busted chest—"

"What happened?" Willis demanded, running for hat and coat and instrument kit.

"A big hold-up! Gang stuck up the crowd at Dobe Monahan's barn dance an' there's been hell to pay. Come on, Doc, for God's sake! I got an extra hoss outside—come on!"

"All right," Willis snapped. "Go out an' wait for me."

He ran into the next room, bent over his mother, who sat knitting in a chair, kissed her, and came back to the living room, his short, well-knit frame bristling with energy.

"Got to leave you, Marian! Instead of riding back to your Uncle John's tonight, would you mind stayin' here with mother?"

"Of course, Donald," she agreed instantly. "Uncle John's foreman is in town tonight, and he'll keep him company. Hurry, dear!" she urged as Willis lingered.

"Marian," he whispered, "it hurts—'way down deep—to think that you don't care for me."

"Oh, but I do!" He started to say something more, and she cut in with: "Hurry, Donald! Those wounded men can't wait a month of Sundays, you know!"

Unheeding, he remarked, "We've been close friends for three years."

"Yes, but we've worn our company manners all the time. Whether we *really* know each other or not, I'm not sure. But let's not talk—go, Donald! Hurry! If you stay, you'll make a regular powow of this."

She tried to push him toward the door.

"I wish," he said earnestly, pleadly, "—I wish you'd marry me."

"Oh—all right!" And she threw up her hands in a little helpless, despairing gesture. A husky note in her voice, she declared: "You're as inescapable as gray hair, Donald. There's no dodging you. . . . Now run along. You'll need fees to get married on, young man,"

she finished with an unsteady laugh, and pushed him toward the door again.

A hasty kiss, and he left. She heard hoofbeats of horses galloping off. She stood there in the center of the room, hands pressed to her forehead, trying to ease the throb in her temples.

"I promised to marry him," she thought. "Was it right? Oh, I wish I knew!"

EXACTLY an hour before this, Carson and his men had arrived at the Bar K Ranch and gone stealthily to their appointed places. Larry Webb, hiding in the darkness back of Monahan's big barn, peered in through a crack as he waited tensely for the signal to spring inside—peered in, gazed at a throng of range folk making frolic.

The Bar K barn was an immense structure with a broad open space in the center. The building had been cleared, stalls slushed with innumerable buckets of water, a wooden floor laid for dancing and greased with candle fat. From the roof overhead hung lanterns gay with Christmas paper, and along the walls were draped festoons of yellow pine needles and rich red cones and great fans from desert palms, and in the corners were heaped banks of mountain lilac and azalea and corn lilies. There were benches, too, laid with wildcat furs and tanned deerskins, and tables that groaned under stacks of barbecued meats and home-baked bread and cake and great piles of fruit.

In the left-hand front stall was an immense barrel of cider that flowed like an all-year spring. In the oppostie front stall, Sheriff Rapaho Neile and his deputies played at poker as they kept an eye on the crowd thronging the dance floor; back of the sheriff, on the ground, was a box, and in it were the weapons of all the range riders present at the jamboree.

Here tonight were every waddy and every rancher within a day's journey who could shake off duty's halter. Here were nesters with families graced with comely daughters. Here were grizzled prospectors and desert freighters and surveyors and even tinware peddlers, all come in for music and frolic, to eat and drink and dance to the scraping of a couple of fiddles wielded by old-timers cunning in the art of making feet thump in time and in tune. Women were few; but tonight all were tireless and high-spirited and gracious; what with stories to swap, healths to drink, greetings to pass and promises to make, no man had time to twiddle his thumbs. Old white-haired, leather-faced Dobe Monahan, especially, was in fine fettle. He beamed at the throng about him, and himself acted as announcer for the dances.

"Quordreele!" he yelled; and then, "Schorteesche!" and later, "Glide Polka!"—and just now it was a set dance. As Larry watched from outside, Dobe Monahan called off the figures, singing out:

"Gents to center, ladies round 'em,
Form a basket, balance all!
Whirl your gals to where you found 'em,
Promenade around the hall!
Balance to your pards an' trot 'em
Round the circle double quick,
Grab an' kiss 'em while you got 'em,
Hold 'em to it if they kick!"

The set over, the dancers scattered to various parts of the barn to eat, to drink, to talk. Toward the rear, pausing close in front of Larry's peep-hole, as Ross Webb had planned beforehand, came Ross and a girl he'd just danced with.

She was a young girl, a slim young girl, a lovely young girl in a blue dress. Her yellow hair caught the lamp light in a thousand sparkling gleams, and her silvery laugh made Larry ache with loneliness. Ross was talking to her, telling her a joke, rattling off a compliment, amusing her so that she bubbled over with mirth.

Watching them, Larry felt anguish of heart.

Sight of this pretty young woman brought bitter thoughts to Larry's mind. He would like to know such a girl; but friendship with her and others like her was impossible for him. He was a thing apart. Between him and her was an impassable barrier. That girl and her kind were to be safeguarded from him and his kind. He was irredeemably outlawed from her sort of people. He was branded with the sinister, ever-hated mark of crime, and cast out, flung into that underworld from which there was no returning.

"Oh, forget it!" he raged at himself. "Your eyes were open when you threw in with Carson!"

He had sworn there would be no regrets. He had considered the price he would pay and the reward he might win—and that reward had seemed great enough to justify any hardship to himself. *Any* hardship! So now he had no right to complain. . . .

Through the ill-fitting boards at the back of the barn he could plainly hear what his brother and the girl were saying.

"What outfit do you belong to?" she asked Ross, smiling prettily up at him. "I've never seen you around here before."

"Why," Ross answered, with that irrepressible grin of his, "I belong to the S.A.D. outfit."

"Never heard of it," she replied, a puzzled look on her face. Her gaze dropped; her brow puckered thoughtfully; and when she looked up at him again her expression was severe.

"You're breaking a rule," she declared. "You're wearing a six-gun in a shoulder holster under your vest. I felt it—and then saw it while we were dancing. Give it to me, please. I'll turn it over to the sheriff for you, and you can get it back when you leave."

Ross smiled, but shook his head.

"No, Miss Alice. I need it."

Her manner became cold.

"I'll have to report you to the sheriff."

Larry heard no more, but just then, from the ranch house some fifty yards away, came a clear whistle—the mournful call of a poorwill repeated three times.

The signal! And as arranged, Larry repeated it in a low whistle for Ross to hear, inside. . . . Now Carson and his four men had overpowered Monahan's guards, the safe was drilled, and all was set for the explosion that would rip it open and lay the money free for Carson to grab. .

Larry, bandanna pulled over his face for a mask, ran to the door at the rear of the barn. His partner was already there, masked, ready to jump inside at the proper instant. At the front of the barn, two more of Carson's men were likewise ready.

Looking in, Larry saw Ross striding through the noisy crowd toward the front stall where the sheriff and his men were sitting. Ross was to get the drop on the officers when the safe explosion shattered the night quiet.

Seconds passed, moments that were heart-breaking with suspense.

Then suddenly a dull, heavy, reverberating *kroo-o-oom* rolled out of the ranch house.

In the huge barn, for a stunned instant everyone stood still, speechless, frozen with surprise.

"It's at the house!" Dobe Monahan yelled. "Come on, Sheriff! Trouble!"

He left the crowded dance floor, started toward the doorway at a run.

A six-gun roared. Monahan stopped short. The sheriff and his men sank back into their seats. Slowly, reluctantly they raised their hands toward the roof. Every pair of eyes in the place fixed on the figure of one man standing before that front stall, smoke curling up from a six-gun levelled in his hand.

And as Ross Webb's voice rang sharp as a lash through the taut silence, Larry and his bandit partner took their places at the back of the barn, and two other masked riders entered at the front, pistols ready.

"Quiet, everybody!" Ross ordered. "Monahan, freeze in your tracks, or my next bullet will tame you for keeps. Don't anybody move! We got you covered, front an' back—any hombre that stirs a finger is askin' for a harp!"

The crowd stood irresolute for an instant, amazement and panic surging through it as terror spreads through a herd of cattle, and like locoed, milling shorthorns they started for the front entrance—and came to a gasping halt at sight of two masked men, weapons ready, barring their way. Toward the rear they headed, and again stopped short when confronted by Larry and his partner.

"Take it easy," Ross Webb advised, "an' nobody will get hurt. I'm talkin' to you especially, Sheriff Neile!"

The throng became very, very quiet.

In a soothing tone, Ross informed them: "This is a hold-up. Monahan's safe is bein' robbed. Listen! You can hear runnin' feet. My partners have got the money we came after—they're headin' for their horses; they're mountin'. . . . Now you can hear hoofbeats. My partners are whippin' an' spurrin' their broncs an' streakin' hellity-larrup to the south. . . . We'll just wait a little while an' give 'em a good head start. . . ."

The crowded guests in the center of the barn stood tense and motionless, waiting; seconds ticked off heavy and portentous. At last the drum of hoofbeats faded in the distance. Still Ross waited. Still the sheriff and his deputies in that front stall, and the throng of men and women, waited in frozen silence.

"All right!" Ross banged out suddenly. "It's time we left. Sheriff Neile, you got a basket of guns behind you. Turn an' heave 'em out that window. Steady, now. No tricks, or I'll prod you with a bullet!"

Neile rose. Slowly the old manhunter bent, lifted the box of weapons and shoved it out the window into the dark. A clatter of metal sounded as the guns hit the ground.

"Now," Ross Webb ordered further, "throw your own six-gun after the rest. You deputies—all of you follow suit! Move fast, damn you!"

Sheriff Neile hesitated, and his men delayed. Never had Rapaho Neile given up his gun; never had he surrendered without a battle. Larry, watching from the rear, sensed a fight. Sheriff Neile looked too rugged, too indomitable, to quit without striking a blow. Larry's finger tensed against trigger, ready. . . .

At that instant, the girl who had danced with Ross Webb spoke up. She was standing near Ross; her words, a bit husky, a bit tremulous, rang sharp in the taut silence.

"So you belong to the S.A.D. outfit!" she flung at Ross. "You lied. You're no cowman. You're a thief, a bandit, a—"

Ross interrupted her. Cut in with a joke. She was mighty pretty, this girl; spirited, too. And a crowd was here, paralyzed, listening to every word, to his every syllable. So gay, irrepressible Ross Webb rattled off a joke with no presentiment that this was to be the last one he would ever tell.

With a quick bow, a flashing smile, he said: "I didn't lie, honey. I do belong to the S.A.D. outfit. S.A.D. means Stand and Deliver!"

He laughed—just once. A pistol roared out with a deafening bang.

Ross had been careless for an instant. Sheriff Neile had gone for his six-gun. Light-swift on the draw, he had pulled, and shot. Ross staggered, swayed, and then—seeing the deputies go for their weapons, too—he began shooting.

Flame lashed from his pistol, and Sheriff Neile lurched, dropped to the floor, a bullet squarely through his heart. Again Ross's six-gun spurted fire, and a deputy was knocked against the wall as if by a giant fist, a slug in his shoulder.

The other deputies had their forty-fives unlimbered and began shooting. A bullet slashed through Ross's left arm and another creased his hip.

The two masked bandits at the barn entrance opened fire on the three remaining deputies. The law officers instantly dropped flat onto their stomachs and pressed trigger in answer.

The hammering roar of pistol shots echoed and reverberated in the closed space of the barn. Larry, at the back of the structure, was in a cold sweat. He could take no part in the fight up front, because the crowd on the dance floor were between him and Ross and the deputies.

"On the floor, everybody!" Larry shouted. "Ross, head for the front door!"

Raising his pistol, Larry sent bullet after bullet into the lanterns hanging from the rafters. Glass popped with a brittle snarling burst of crystals. Darkness swooped like an avalanche onto the barn.

Just before utter blackness filled the place, Larry saw Ross slump to his knees, and slowly fall. . . . Then scarlet stabs of flame pierced the murk, and the roar of guns echoed and re-echoed with staggering force.

Larry ran forward, thrusting aside whoever rose in his way, and reached his brother. Raising him, Larry charged through the darkness to the dim-lit square of the front door. Out he ran, carrying Ross's inert form.

"Tex!" Larry called. "Burnett!"

"Over here, Larry!" the bandits answered. "This way—the horses!"

In the dim moonlight he saw them, saw the broncs waiting fifty yards away under some cottonwoods. He headed for them. The other bandits paused, fired bullets high into the barn to discourage pursuit.

Larry raised his brother into the saddle, swung onto his own bronc; then, with an arm about Ross to hold him on horseback, he swerved the mounts southward and shot the steel to them. The last two outlaws emptied their guns at the barn, then vaulted onto their broncs and spurred after Larry.

Ross was so utterly limp, so inert in Larry's hold, that Larry grew deathly afraid. And when he felt something warm and moist against his hand, his heart skipped a beat in dread. Ross still had courage, however; still had fire in him.

"You darn old hoss thief," he swore affectionately at Larry, his voice barely carrying above the clatter of galloping hoofs. "Always turnin' up to save your brother from some of his own damn foolishness. . . . But this time, lad, I'm afraid you're too late. . . . I guess—I can't—be helped—any more. . . ."

CHAPTER III

One Chance in Nine

SOME thirty minutes of hard riding, of angling and doubling to make pursuit difficult, and Larry's half of the gang joined Carson's bunch at camp near Pegleg Well.

"Carson," Larry rapped out, "a posse won't be able to trail us until daylight. Ross is hurt bad. Let's stay here a spell an' do something for him."

He spread blankets on the ground near the campfire, and gently lowered his brother onto them and made him as comfortable as he could. A bloody froth bubbled on Ross's lips. And he lay—reckless, mettlesome, gay-hearted Ross Webb—with his eyes shut in agony, inert, fighting for breath, fighting to stave off an eternity of darkness and oblivion. Larry opened his shirt, looked at the wounds. Larry's heart sank as he realized that, aside from other hurts, Ross had a bullet through his lungs. His vitality was great; his will strong; nevertheless, hope of recovery was very, very slim.

"Larry," Ross whispered, gaspingly, "I'm done. I'm beat."

No protest was in his words, only acceptance of whatever the cards turned up for him.

"Forget it, Ross!" Larry urged with a heartiness he was far from feeling. "You an' I have a lot of trail-ridin' ahead of us!"

Ross feebly shook his head.

"No, Larry."

Straightening up, Larry walked over to Buck Carson.

"Well?" the gang leader demanded bruskly. "Is he a goner?"

"Ross is hurt damn bad, Carson."

"It's a dirty shame," Carson had the grace to say. Shrugging, he added, "But there's nothin' we can do."

"I'm goin' to get a doctor for Ross."

"You can't move 'im!"

"I'll bring a doctor here, Carson."

"You mean you'll leave Ross alone while you go rustle a sawbones?"

"No," Larry answered sharply. "You men will stay an' watch over Ross."

"Like hell!" Carson snorted, his hard face ugly with wrath. "Do as you damn please, Webb, but the rest of us are ridin' south pronto!"

Knowing Carson, Larry was prepared for this refusal. Before answering, he strode close to the campfire and picked up the saddle bags into which the money stolen from Monahan had been packed. Then he turned toward the gang. The men stood with Carson, in a careless half circle.

Larry faced them—and suddenly his hand swooped up from holster with his six-gun. And his words dropped into the silence hard as bullets falling into a pan as he said:

"The rest of you are *not* ridin' south, pronto; you're stayin' here to take care of Ross!"

"You gone loco?" Carson blazed. "Drop that money an' put up your gun, or we'll rip your guts out with lead!"

"Men," Larry retorted, his words earnest and resolute, "I'm one against nine. But I can handle a six-gun with any of you. . . . I've got the money stolen tonight. I'm takin' it with me —I'm ridin' to get a doctor for Ross. Two of you side me to make sure I don't double-cross you. The rest stay here, with Ross. I'll hand the money back when I return. If my plan ain't agreeable, go for your guns. You're nine against one, an' you'll kill me sure —but I'll drop two-three of you in the doing. Make up your minds, pronto! I'm callin' the turn—or is it a fight?"

Tall, his lithe body erect and poised, he faced them. He was twenty-four, Larry Webb, gray-eyed, clean-cut of features. He was quiet-spoken, did not dominate a group as his older brother had done. But the same steel that lay back of Ross Webb's recklessness stiffened Larry's backbone; he was no daredevil, but he possessed a resolute courage and a steadiness of purpose that nothing could sway once his keen mind had snapped to a decision. And where Ross was apt to lose sight of others' rights in a want or mood of his own, Larry had in him a deep capacity for self-sacrifice. Unfaltering now, he stood up to Carson.

"Well?" he repeated. "Do we go for a doctor, or is it a gun argument?"

"I want—" Carson began angrily. But Larry's pistol lashed fire and the sombrero leaped from Carson's head. He winced, gulped, and finished, "I want to know where you'll get a sawbones?"

"We'll ride to Tres Pinos. Doc Willis is the only medicine man in fifty miles."

Back to Tres Pinos! The men gasped at the audacity of it. Dobe Monahan's ranch was on the outskirts of Tres Pinos!

"Well?" Larry questioned grimly. "Do we go?"

"We go," said Carson. "Me an' Red Burnett will ride with you."

CHAPTER IV

Death Is Unfair

SOME forty minutes later, Larry and his two partners rode up to Doc Willis's cabin on the edge of the little cowtown of Tres Pinos.

Inside the house, Marian Hazlett heard a clatter of hoofs. A sharp rat-tat-tat beat upon the front door. She left her chair beside Mrs. Willis's, and went to open.

"Is Doc Willis in?" Larry asked.

"No, he's not," she answered. "He rode to the Bar K Ranch over an hour ago."

Larry's disappointment was so keen, so despairing, so utterly staggering, that Marian could not help but notice it.

"When will Doc be back?" he asked.

"I don't know. Two men were badly wounded, and so he had a heap of work on his hands."

Larry turned to go, his face pale and tense with a grief he could not hide.

"Wait!" Marian said impulsively. "Can't I help you? I'm a trained nurse, and a darned good one!"

As she intended, this brought a little smile to Larry's stricken face, and a flash of hope to his mind. But looking more closely at her, noticing how young and lovely this tall, ruddy-haired girl was, his hope dwindled; she seemed too sweet, too ornamental for a nurse's stern duties. However, he decided to clutch desperately at any slim chance of bringing help to Ross.

"It's my brother that's hurt," he explained huskily. "Hurt bad, real bad. I—haven't much hope for him."

"Bring him here."

"Can't. Don't dare move Ross from camp. Listen, Miss—"

"Marian Hazlett."

"I'm Larry Webb. Miss Hazlett, I'm afraid my brother hasn't one chance in ten of pullin' through. Come to camp with us. Try to help him, an' I'll be eternally grateful to you!"

She hesitated. Somehow, she trusted this young rider. But the other two men were wolves in sheep's clothing if ever she saw any.

Again Larry urged: "Ride with us, Miss Hazlett. I promise to take good care of you."

His manner was so earnest, so sincere, and he was so obviously haggard with dread and worry over his brother, that she believed him and had faith in him.

"All right," she decided. "Wait for me. I'll go with you."

She turned back into the house, told Mrs. Willis of her intention. Donald's mother warned her against trusting herself with these strangers, and voiced a dozen doubts and suspicions. But Marian grabbed up her coat and sombrero—she had ridden from the other side of town in boots and riding skirt—and was ready.

"Don't go!" Mrs. Willis cautioned. "Marian, wait for Donald. You don't know the first thing about these strangers!"

"But a man's badly hurt," Marian protested. "I can't sit here knitting ear-muffs when a man's dying for lack of somebody to tend to him right. I'd go mad! Oh, don't worry, mother. I trust these men. They look like top-hands to me."

And she left.

But after she was mounted, and was galloping south at Larry's side, doubts and forebodings preyed upon her.

THEY had been riding some ten minutes or so when a faint shout was flung at them from behind. Topping a rise, Carson rumbled a command to halt. They stopped, listened, and heard plainly the drum of pursuing hoofbeats.

"One rider, comin' hellity-larrup!" Carson announced. "Hit the chaparral. We'll stop this jasper!"

All reined into a thick clump of laurel and red-berry, and waited in tense silence.

Closer and closer came the rhythmic beat of hoofs. And presently, onto the moonlit crest of the rise galloped a horseman.

Buck Carson, at Marian's side, raised his six-gun—just as she recognized their pursuer.

"Don't shoot!" she gasped. "That's Dr. Willis. . . . Oh, Donald! Stop!" she called, and rode out to meet him.

"Hello!" Willis replied. "Marian, I got home just after you left. Mother said you'd ridden the desert trail south, so I followed." He turned then to face the riders following Marian.

Larry rode forward, named himself to the doctor.

"What's happened?" Willis demanded.

"My brother's bad hurt," Larry answered. "Miss Hazlett came along to try an' help him."

"I see. Well, soon's we take Miss Hazlett home I'll ride along with you."

"No, nix, huh-uh," Carson rasped, swerving his bronc over beside the doctor's. "We'll need her for a nurse; an' besides, we haven't got time to backtrack. Ross Webb is too far gone."

"You're not givin' *me* orders!" Doc Willis blazed. "Miss Hazlett rides—"

"With us," Carson finished, ramming the muzzle of his six-gun into Willis's side. "Are you comin' to your milk or must I spank?"

His words were light, but Willis had had enough dealings with tough customers to know a bluff from a promise.

"All right," he snapped. "We'll go along. But I warn you! You're usin' a high hand, and you'll pay for it. What outfit do you men belong to?"

"The S.A.D. outfit," Red Burnett put in sweetly. "Gatherin' strays on the Borego Desert."

"I promise you," Willis threatened, "that the S.A.D. bunch is going to be a *sad* outfit when I finish with you. Now let's ride!"

Southward they loped, down a long watershed, down a trail winding over boulder washes and crossing a lazy ribbon of water a dozen times; and finally they galloped out onto the great basin of Borego Desert. A quarter of an hour more, and they neared a shadowy clump of trees, the willows and sycamores that marked the tiny oasis of Pegleg Well. Here, about a campfire, waited the rest of Carson's band.

At once Larry took Marian and Doc Willis to Ross's side.

"My brother, Doc," he whispered. "Do all you can for him!"

Willis did not bend over Ross at once, but paused to stare, a bit startled, a bit wonderstruck. There is a type of man who looks as strapping, as vigorous and handsome, as immune to the lightnings and fires of ordinary living, as a great redwood. Ross Webb was one of these men, Willis thought. When a forest giant topples and lies prone in all its bulk and majesty of form, a passing rider will look on with a catch in his breath and a tug at his heart; it is so rare, so superb, so overwhelmingly fine! Its fall is a tragic pity when meaner things survive. And so with Ross Webb. While meaner men moved and had their being, it was a grievous thing that one of his heroic mold must lie inert and helpless as an image of sodden mud, his body racked, his fine eyes taut with pain, just a stone's throw this side of oblivion. Thinking this, Doc Willis bent over Ross and opened his shirt, his fingers moving with a touch that was deft and respecting.

His face grave, he examined Ross's hurts. . . . And then, of a sudden, a change came over the doctor's expression. He looked puzzled, and then abruptly he was angry, raging. He leaped to his feet, red-faced, eyes blazing with wrath.

"This man's been *shot!*" he stormed. "By the Lord, you all are thieves—you're the men who robbed Dobe Monahan tonight! You're outlaws, bandits!"

"Right," Larry said gently. "But, Doc, no harm's comin' to you or Miss Hazlett. My brother's far gone; won't you help him all you can?"

Marian was stunned with surprise to learn that Larry and these men were bandits. She was too amazed to be afraid, and then too bitterly disappointed. Larry Webb had won her trust and liking from the start. Presently, however, pity for Ross Webb, lying in agony here, crowded out her other feelings.

"Please, Donald," she urged. "Tend to this man."

Willis muttered savagely under his breath, hesitated, then bent over Ross again. Some minutes passed. Willis rose, and with professional discretion he drew Larry to one side.

"Webb," he said, "there's no hope for your brother. It's a matter of minutes now before he goes."

Larry nodded and turned aside without a word; but at the look of anguished grief on his face, Marian's heart went out to him; and even Doc Willis, hardened as he was to death, was stirred by sympathy. Outlaws or not, here was a man stricken down when his powers were at their lusty prime, and here was his brother, whose sorrow was deep, abiding. Even the other bandits were jarred out of their callous indifference; they gathered in an uneasy group on the far side of the campfire and avoided each other's glance. They knew it was no ordinary tie of family that bound Ross and Larry, but a friendship as loyal and steadfast as it was rare.

Larry kneeled beside Ross and with his neckerchief he wiped beads of cold sweat from Ross's livid forehead, and grasped his tense hand. Ross looked up at him, and a little smile crooked his pale lips.

"I told you I was done for," he breathed. "You've been mighty loyal, Bud—mighty loyal—more than I deserved. This is a dirty trick—me leavin' you—after you've tried so hard, when you need me most. It's a dirty trick. Don't—don't hold it against me."

He was silent for a space, out of sheer weariness. Then again that wry little smile curved his lips.

"Bend close, Larry," he requested, a faint sparkle in his dimming eyes. Larry obeyed; and Ross whispered to him in secretive fashion, and he finished with a laugh, though that laugh was but a ghost of its former rollicking self. "So Carson stole my pack, just a couple minutes ago. I been expectin' it, an' he'll surely be fooled. . . . Larry, promise you'll do it like I said! Promise! In spite of hell an' high water, you'll do it, an' do it *right!*"

"I promise," Larry solemnly answered.

"Good."

The word seemed to take the last of Ross's strength. He said no more. He closed his eyes; over his face passed a look of intensest suffering; his hand groped, found Larry's, tightened.

Marian could not bear to stay close by any longer. Turning away, she walked to the edge of the circle of firelight. Presently she saw Larry rise and stumble off into the darkness, and sit down on a boulder and lower his head onto his hands.

CHAPTER V

Gambling for a Girl

THEY buried Ross Webb at the foot of a tall yucca thrusting a cone of creamy white blossoms into the air. . . .

Doc Willis turned to Carson and said: "Bring our horses up. Miss Hazlett an' I are startin' home."

"Wait," Carson grunted.

He stalked to the far end of the oasis and called his men together. They assembled, sat on their spurs in a ring about Carson, attentive; only Larry seemed indifferent—with them, but far away in his thoughts.

"Listen, men," Carson growled, his swarthy face twisted in a frown. "We're up a stump. Daybreak is less'n half an hour off, an' at sun-up a posse from Tres Pinos will go to Monahan's ranch an' pick up our trail from there. It'll take 'em maybe three-four hours to follow us here, unravelin' our sign. What we got to do is scatter, separate, an' leave almost a dozen trails to confuse 'em. They won't split up to chase us, they won't know which way to ride—by the time they get squared around, most of us will be in safe country. So, we'll divide the loot, an' every man jack of us will follow his nose in a different direction from his partners."

This was met with silence by the men; thoughtfully they considered the plan. . . . Marian, feeling chill, walked unobserved to the campfire and sat down. Without meaning to, she had moved close enough to hear everything spoken at Carson's powwow.

"Chief," Strap Woods put in, "what'll we do about Doc Willis? If he rides

back to Tres Pinos, he can send a posse straight here. Instead of a lead of three-four hours, we'll have less'n an hour head start."

"Doc Willis," Red Burnett whipped in, "is *not* lopin' home. We got to fix that hombre so he won't talk!"

"How about the girl?" Monte Priest demanded. "She could send a pack of law-johnnies a-whoopin' after us."

"We can't let her go, either!" Carson snapped. "That'd be plumb suicide!"

"Besides," Lafe Smith added, "we don't *want* to let her go."

"I'll say we don't!" Tex Hawn put in, with a short laugh and a sidelong glance at the other men.

"So what'll we do?" queried Hawk-eye Maginnis. "Who'll ride herd on Doc an' the girl?"

Carson's face hardened.

He said: "We can't take chances with Willis. He's the only man who knows how many are in our gang or what our names are. He's the only hombre who could positively identify us to the sheriff if we ever got caught. So we got to shut his mouth for keeps. The girl—she'll trail with me."

Larry, sick at heart with grief, had been listening with but half an ear. Carson's words, however, shocked him to alertness, and he sprang to his feet, anger surging through him.

"For God's sake, Carson, are we a bunch of low-down back-biting Piutes? Doc Willis an' this girl came here because we asked 'em to—as a special favor—to help one of your own partners! Now you plan to thank 'em for bein' decent to us by playin' wolf with 'em. Well, you won't! You hear? Damn you, Carson, no harm's comin' to that girl, an' no—"

Instantly the men nearest Larry grabbed him, jerked him down, pinioned him flat to the ground; he had got the drop on the gang earlier in the night, and they were not going to let it happen again.

"You goin' to play *our* way," demanded Red Burnett, "or must we waste you?"

Realizing he was helpless, Larry nodded.

"Let him up," Carson ordered.

Larry stood erect, as an idea gripped him.

Then fiercely he turned on the men and whipped out: "You hombres are a bunch of suckers! Lettin' Buck Carson walk off with this girl while you squat on your heels like a bunch of blind, toothless Injuns! What right has he got to reach out an' grab a prize like this? Listen! We're partnerin' share an' share alike in this gang. No man's got the right to pitch off with all the sunshine an' roses without givin' the rest of us a chance for a winning! We'll cut cards to see who this girl travels with!"

He pulled a deck of cards from his pocket.

Carson sprang to his feet, savage words of refusal on his tongue. . . . But the men were growling assent to Larry's suggestion, and the glances Carson met were jealous, hostile. So, after a hasty look around, he was wise enough to check his rage, to hide his disappointment, and agree.

"I'm not tryin' to put anything over on you all," he lied. "Shuffle the cards, Webb, an' deal us one apiece."

Under the watchful eyes of the gang, Larry riffled the cards, mixed them carefully. To Marian, watching unnoticed, all this seemed unreal, unbelievable; things had happened with dazing swiftness. A hold-up, her promise to marry Donald, a man dying before her, now threat of another killing and danger of vicious treatment for herself. She looked at Doc Willis; he was staring impatiently at the gang from his seat on a boulder, not suspecting trouble. Should she tell him? Should the two of them make a dash for liberty?

She looked around for the horses. . . . A stiff wind was kicking over the willows and sycamores of the oasis; pellets of sand struck her cheek. At thought of a sand storm, fear stabbed through her.

This Borego Desert was in the path of the dreaded *santa annas,* dust hurricanes that swept up from Mexico like a legion of hungry-throated wolves, with a fury of wind-driven sand and fine gravel, blotting out the sky, covering trails and springs and arroyos and pushing the dunes far forward in their race. To be caught out in such a storm meant risking death. To attempt escape without horses, moreover, was as senseless as trying to outrun a stampede while wearing handcuffs and hobbles. She and Donald would *have* to get their saddlers.

The broncs, however, were tethered on the other side of camp, near the bandits.

"All right," she heard Larry Webb say, "here come the cards. Remember, the man getting the highest card will travel with the girl."

He paused, looked at the men speculatively.

"Listen, I got another ante to make. Larry started to deal the cards. will also have the job of puttin' Doc Willis where the dogs won't bark at him. All right?"

Solemnly they agreed to this.

Larry started to deal the cards. Marian watched, and listened, in an agony of suspense and revulsion. These men were gambling for her as if she were a prize! Whoever won would take her out into the desert with him. Whoever won would take Donald Willis out into the chaparral and shoot him down like a loco steer!

Aghast, her heart thumping wildly within her, she stared at the faces of the outlaws, searching for a look of pity, for a sign of relenting; but she found no hope, no comfort. Stony, hard-bitten faces she saw, on them no kindliness and no compassion.

Red Burnett's thick-lipped, massive-jawed countenance was rough with bristles, his narrow eyes steely. Monte Priest, with his hook nose and high cheekbones and sloping forehead, looked merciless as a bronze Indian. Tex Hawn was fat, his bulging jowls crowding a blunt nose and retreating chin—sensitive as a totem pole. Hawk-eye Maginnis, Strap Woods, Lafe Smith, and the rest, all bore the stamp of the criminal on features bitten deep with the acid of hate and bitterness and sullen defiance. A tough crew; but one dominated by the bulk and savage strength of Buck Carson. Of them all, only Larry Webb seemed a man of honest impulse, of frank and generous nature; but he was playing this vicious game with the rest.

One by one he dealt a card on the ground in front of each of the men sitting on their spurs.

"King!" exulted Carson.

Burnett got a deuce.

Tex Hawn received a ten.

Maginnis got a three, Monte Priest a jack, Lafe Smith an eight, and so it went.

Finally Larry flipped a card down in front of himself. At sight of it the other men started.

"Ace," he said coolly. "I win."

An instant of silence, then angry, challenging words. It looked bad for Larry to win: he had dealt the cards.

"Stop it!" he banged, jumping to his feet. "We made a bargain, now stick to it! I got the top card—so I take the girl with me, I take Doc Willis out into the brush an' put a bullet through his head."

Still the men growled.

Larry flung them another bone: "Tell you what! To square things even more, I'll give you all my share an' Ross's share of the loot to split among you."

He strode to his horse, pulled off the saddle bags into which Monahan's stolen money had been packed, and emptied the bank notes in a green and yellow cloud at Carson's feet.

"Fair enough?" he demanded.

For a moment the men were silent; thought of dividing two extra shares of that cash among them was sweet. After all, only one of the nine riders could have the pleasure of Marian's company, while *all* could enjoy spending an extra wad of money.

"Fair enough," Red Burnett grunted, and the rest chorused agreement.

Larry did not delay an instant.

Leaving the powwow, walking around the fire, he approached Doc Willis and said: "Come on, Doc. I want a word with you."

Marian, at last, was stirred into action. Until this minute, all that was happening seemed part of some garish nightmare, utterly unreal; but now Larry was *actually* taking Donald Willis out into the chaparral. . . .

Marian darted to Willis, flung her arms about his neck, clung to him.

"Don't go, Donald!" she gasped. "Don't go—he'll shoot you! He'll kill you!"

Willis looked at her, at the grimly silent men, at Larry's taut face, and guessed the truth. He blanched; his knees trembled; he tried to speak but words would not come.

"Shake a leg!" Larry snapped, and thrust the muzzle of his six-gun into Willis's side. "Move! Head straight into the chaparral yonder!"

Grasping Willis's elbow, he pushed him on into the brush to the right of camp. Marian screamed, tried to hold onto Willis, but Carson grabbed her and pulled her back. She turned and fought him, beat his chest with her two fists; he merely laughed and drew her close.

"Let go of me!" she cried. "You—you murderers!"

Carson let her struggle for a minute, grinning down at her; then abruptly his arms tightened and he pressed her close, kissed her. With all her strength she fought him. . . . Then of a sudden she went limp, her tall young body quivering in an anguish of grief, for out in the chaparral a pistol roared, its bark heavy, lingering, fateful. Just once.

"It's done," Carson grunted, and let go of her.

She slumped down onto a boulder.

Larry Webb strode back into the circle of the firelight. His face stony, he pushed an empty, smoking cartridge from his pistol and slipped a fresh one into the cylinder.

Then he filled a couple of canteens at the well, and led two horses near the campfire.

He turned to Carson, who stood with his men, watching.

"Carson," Larry snapped, his words ringing hard, "a little while ago, just before Ross died, you Injuned over to his hoss, an' stole a pack tied to his saddle. *Give—me—that—pack!*"

Carson's response was swift, startling.

His hand came up from his side, six-gun levelled, and he rasped: "I'm keepin' that pack for myself. *Savvy?* Just one more word about it, Webb, an' I'll give you a bullet smack between the eyes. Now git to hell out of camp!"

Their eyes clashed like swords; Larry took a step forward, then he shrugged.

"All right, I'm leavin'," he said. "But first I'm warnin' you, Carson. We're not partners any more. You've busted up this gang. You've made me go back on a promise I made to Willis an' this girl—that they wouldn't be harmed. An' finally, you're keepin' something that belongs to me, an' runnin' me out of camp with a gun. You win, *this time*. But Carson, from now on, between us there's war. From now on, if ever we meet again, it'll be a case of the hombre who shoots first gettin' the last laugh. That goes for you an' any of your sidekicks. Remember it!"

"I won't forget it," Carson sneered. "I like laughin' last."

Larry turned away.

"All right, Miss Hazlett," he called. "Let's ride. A sand storm is kickin' up, an' we want to be in safer country when it hits."

Realizing it was useless to protest or struggle, she came forward. He tried to help her to mount, but she sprang into the saddle without his aid: she felt that if he touched her she would cower, and scream, or turn on him in a fury—for she hated him, hated with a passion she had never felt against any

man or thing. He had shot Donald Willis in cold blood; he had won her by gambling for her as if she were a plaster doll at a fair. And she had *trusted* him! She had thought she read courage and honesty on his face, and all the time he was as wolfish at heart as any of the rest of these desert thieves. . . .

Larry spurred his bronc out of the oasis, and led the way toward the west. Once out of the shelter of willows and sycamores, they felt the force of the rising wind. It came from the left, in driving, relentless gusts that whipped flat the greasewood and mesquite, in gusts so fierce the broncs had to lean against them. Glancing around, Marian saw that the utter blackness of night was fading and a gray mist of light swept the sky, and that the eastern horizon was shot with streamers of silver and soft yellow.

Larry urged: "Kick your hoss, Miss Hazlett. We got to make far-apart tracks away from trouble!"

Bitterly she taunted: "Worried about me? After all, you *did* pay a big price for me. Didn't you? Your share of that loot might have bought you a nice bunch of steers!"

"So you heard?" he said, low-voiced. "I'm sorry."

He said no more; drew away, as if wincing under her words; but she was too deep in her own grief to notice.

Larry pushed on through a broad stand of manzanita, came out onto an old trail, and followed it down a boulder-strewn arroyo.

Of a sudden, a figure loomed up in the darkness, close to the path, Larry's horse shied, and Marian's bronc halted, snorting. A little cry of fright escaped Marian.

"Webb!" called the figure. "Marian—it's me—Donald!"

Marian could hardly believe what she heard; the wind was moaning and the darkness was thick with shadows, and for a moment she wondered if her senses were playing tricks on her. But Larry reined close by, and called out.

"Willis!" he snapped. "Hurry up, Doc! Mount behind Miss Hazlett. Quick! We got to burn the breeze gettin' away. Carson an' his thievin' cur dogs will be after us any time now!"

Willis climbed onto Marian's horse, behind her, and put an arm about her waist—fortunately, for she was so limp with surprise and relief she swayed in saddle.

"*You*, Donald!" she whispered tremulously. "Thank heavens!"

He kissed her. Taking the reins, he swerved the bronc northward, toward Tres Pinos.

"No!" Larry whipped at him. "We got to ride south an' west, or we'll bang straight into Carson's outfit!"

He led the way southwest at a stiff pace. They rode over flat desolate country studded with hummocks of sage and parched growth of rabbit brush and vicious cholla cactus. Dawn broke; and the sun arched over a peak-line to the east.

CHAPTER VI

Trailed

THEY were galloping up a low rise when suddenly, from behind them, a long shout came rolling.

Larry glanced back. "Good Lord!" he gasped. "Carson has divided his men into search parties, an' one of 'em is onto us already! Spur your hoss, Willis!"

The doctor obeyed, and their broncs shot forward at top speed.

Marian looked back. A long ways behind them came Buck Carson and three of his riders, pursuing at a headlong gallop. A thirty-thirty cracked out, and a bullet whined over Larry's head. Shouts for them to halt and fragments of threats were carried to them, splintered by the wind. . . . On and on, for a mile—two miles—the chase lengthened, and always Carson's men gained on the three fugitives. Marian's buckskin, carrying double, began to break under the terrific strain.

Larry swerved his speeding pinto

south toward a long, low range of hills.

"We got to reach that cover!" he shouted to Willis. "If the storm breaks soon, maybe we can shake Carson off!"

Looking back, Marian saw their pursuers had closed up half the gap between them. She glimpsed them dimly, for the day was growing dark. Southward, a great cloud of dust was swooping toward them, filling half the sky; and here already the air was stifling and sulphurous and shone like motes of reddish Roman gold. The sun looked like a ball of fire, red as blood. And the wind, whistling through the thin, battered chaparral, drove particles of sand before it that cut Marian's hands and face like blizzard snow.

The chase leveled out across an alkali flat. Looking back again, Marian cried aloud in sudden fright. Carson and his three men were terribly close; she could see them lift their rifles for snap shooting from a lurching saddle. The snarl of thirty-thirty's cracked out again. A slug hissed overhead. Willis suddenly jerked and swore as a bullet tugged at his coat. Again, and then once more, lead whined past them.

Larry turned in saddle, and pressed trigger in answer a couple times. Again a rifle spurted fire from behind—and to Marian's horror, Larry's horse lunged high and pitched forward, fell headlong, catapulting Larry a dozen yards away. Marian screamed, tugged at the reins Willis held, and halted their bronc.

"Stop, Donald! Pick Larry up!"

"No—we haven't time!"

But Larry had risen. Bending over his fallen mount, he jerked canteen from saddle, and a rifle. And dropping on one knee, he blazed away at their pursuers. Once he fired and a second time smoke spurted from his thirty-thirty—and the foremost of Carson's horsemen lurched in saddle and slid head-down to the ground.

Instantly Carson and his two other men scattered into a wide semi-circle, and halted for steady aim at Larry. Three-four bullets kicked up dirt within a few feet of him. Twice more he squeezed trigger; a slug of his creased Carson's gelding and the bronc lunged into a rearing tearing run, and fought his rider like mad. The other two outlaws, however, were getting Larry's range. A bullet knocked the sombrero from his head; another slit a jagged rent in his vest. Then Carson got his horse under control, and raised his rifle and sent a bullet smoking past Larry's ear.

Larry jumped to his feet and ran back to where Marian had halted her bronc.

"Beat your hoss!" he told her and Willis. "Head for that middle canyon in the hills yonder. Fast! I'll run alongside!"

He had yelled, standing right by them, but they barely heard his words for the wind snatched them away. Directly into that gale they rode now, toward a wall of dust that bore down on them with lightning speed. Halfway up the sky it reached, so dense it seemed solid, careening forward like a hurricane. On it came, irresistible, inescapable, sand lashing and billowing on its crest—a mile a minute! With a shriek and swoop it dashed upon the hills close by and avalanched upon Larry and Marian and Willis, a whirling yellow storm cloud, a whooping, blinding, deafening fury of darkness, of blasts of sand gravel that battered like clubs, that screamed and dazed and hammered, that blotted out the world.

"All right—we're in the hills!" Larry shouted. "Sit tight. Carson may lose us!"

He led the bronc to the lee of a cliff where part of the savage force of that desert hurricane was shunted off. Here they waited, hugging the rock, coats over their heads against that swirling tumult of sand.... Once Marian heard the tag end of a shout whipped past by a rocket of wind, and very faintly she caught three gunshots, like a signal. But no further sign of Carson's men did they receive. Time passed with

agonizing slowness, each second crammed with the misery of buffeting winds and scoriating dust and the wild banshee wailing of the storm gusts. One upon another, the taut minutes piled into an hour.

The tempest blew itself out; a brief heavy shower of rain spattered down, and ceased abruptly. And abruptly the sun pierced through the frayed ends of the storm, which became a lowering cloud in the distance. The wind died. And once again the desert was quiet and sullen and brazen with heat.

Cautiously Larry led the way out of these hills onto the trail westward again. The great flat of Borego Desert was empty of riders; pursuit had passed on.

"We're lucky!" he exulted. "Carson has lost us!"

"Tell me," Marian asked earnestly, "why have we been followed?"

"Yes, why were they chasin' us?" Doc Willis seconded. "Because you fooled them about killin' me?"

"No, that isn't it, not all of it," Larry answered; for a bit he hesitated, and a blush actually reddened his face. "They got a bigger reason. Miss Hazlett, you—you remember I said I'd take care of you? Well, I didn't want you to ride off into the desert with any of Carson's playmates but myself. They're curly wolves, those hombres. So when we cut cards to see who'd get you for a partner, I made sure I'd win. . . . I don't blame Carson's men for bein' on the prod now. They've discovered that in the deck of cards I dealt 'em there's an extra ace."

MARIAN tried to thank him, but he said hastily that it was time to ride on.

"Let's travel!" Doc Willis said. "I got a case of measles an' one of typhoid to look after in Tres Pinos."

Larry shook his head.

"No! We can't lope straight for town, Doc—that's just what Carson is figurin' on. Likely he's spaced his men in a long line between us an' Tres Pinos. We'll ride south an' west an' swing *around* his hyenas. An' we'll cover our tracks as we go."

"Why take the trouble to do that?"

"Because I'm afoot an' we can't travel faster than I can walk. Carson's men are mounted on fast hosses. See? If once they cut our trail they can run us down like a wolf pack chasin' a hamstrung deer. If they catch us, they'll leave you an' me lyin' in the chaparral, an' likely they'll cut cards again for Miss Hazlett. So we got to hide our tracks! Now let's ramble!"

He looked keenly at Marian. In her fine gray eyes was an undaunted spark, and her slim girlish figure was erect in the saddle. She had lost her sombrero, but her heavy mass of shining bronzy hair would be some protection against the sun. She would stand the gaff of bitter-hard travel without a whimper, he told himself; nevertheless, he decided to spare her what punishment he could. He took off his heavy blue cotton shirt and handed it to her.

"Better slip it on, Miss Hazlett. Your leather coat's too hot for this kind of weather, an' that white waist of yours won't protect you from the sun. I don't need this shirt; I'm tanned like an old shoe."

He was, too; his fine muscular shoulders and arms were bronzed to saddle color. So Marian gratefully drew the shirt over her.

"Thanks—Larry," she said. To call him Mr. Webb, now, seemed to her a senseless formality.

He insisted that the doctor ride with Marian. He himself was used to desert travel, Larry explained; accustomed to drinking once in the morning and again at night, and to bearing up under heat that would make ordinary sinners lose all fear of the hereafter. . . . None the less, when they started south, Marian noticed that he weaved a bit in his stride. She realized that Larry had been badly jarred when his horse threw him; moreover, there was a cut on his forehead that might have been made by

a rock. But Larry complained not at all; at a steady pace he led them southward.

The flat, torrid desolation of Borego Desert stretched out forever and forever toward the east, the west, the south; and everywhere was heat. It poured down from the sky in burning shafts. It wavered in a shimmering sun dance over plain and sink and arroyo. Vast and merciless, that heat haze distilled innumerable odors from the scraggly brush of the sand levels—odors of warm sap, of tar weed, of black sage and creosote. And as the sun mounted, to forge ahead under that bombardment of heat became an ordeal by fire.

In order to lose their tracks, Larry led the way across a broad sink of sand and gypsum. This dust was snowy white and glistening. It kicked up under the horse's hoofs and was wind-whipped into billowy clouds. So light and powdery was it that it held no imprint. Feet plunged into it and came out leaving no more tracks than in water.

Angling westward from this sink, they crossed a level terrace made by some river, long ago, and smoothed by a glacier. This floor was like that of some ancient temple, a mosaic of rock a thousand acres broad. Pebbles of jasper, of agate and carnelian, were laid in a smooth pavement. It was as flat as if rolled. From its polished surfaces, swept clean by desert winds, the afternoon sun flashed fire. On this vast highway hoofs left no more tracks than on glass.

Over a far-flung lava badlands Larry pointed the way for Marian and the doctor, and through a gap in a low escarpment of red granite flung like a snake across the desert. Through this notch they passed, and stopped suddenly at its far end, appalled by the hot, fierce beauty of the scene before them.

Sand dune after sand dune after sand dune drifted on ahead in an endless succession, their rhythmic curves as graceful as lines of running water. From each slanting face and ridge a fine mist of sand curled off and drifted away as smoky veils, weaving and tumbling in dainty spirals, following every arch and curve. Off to the skyline the dunes stretched, huge breakers of a dazzling yellow ocean, creeping and undulating in the heated atmosphere.

"We've got to cross this dune country," Larry announced, words rasping from his throat. "It'll be a hard trip. But if Carson's men have been able to follow us so far, here we'll shake 'em off."

Willis dismounted, for Marian's bronc was weakening, and they started on again. Marian and the doctor had already emptied their canteen. So Larry—saying he would share his water supply with them—took their container, and presently handed it back. Willis drank freely; Marian too felt thirst in her throat like a scorpion with red-hot claws. Larry did not drink; he strode along as if made of iron, silent, deep in his own thoughts.

Up a dune, a moment of poising on its sharp crest, sliding down, then up again—for hours they repeated the same tedious process. Weariness pressed on them like some devilish burden that soaked weight out of the very heat.

Finally, as the sun arched down behind a western range, rimming minaret and rocky spear point with gold, they crossed the dune country and Larry called a halt for rest.

"Lord, but I'm thristy!" Willis complained.

He raised his canteen to his lips again, but it was empty.

"Webb," he asked, "mind givin' me another sip of your water?"

Larry looked at him, at Marian, turned red, as if embarrassed because he must refuse.

"Sorry, Doc," he answered. "My canteen's empty."

Marian gasped as realization came upon her. When Larry had "shared" his water with her and Willis, he had

really given them all he had. And Larry, his head throbbing, feverish from that rock cut, had walked all day long, through all the terrific heat, without a single gulp of water.

CHAPTER VII

The Trek to Water

LARRY led them on toward a group of low buttes, into a little canyon. While Marian and the doctor rested, he scouted through the desert valley.

He found a barrel-head cactus. With his knife he hacked off the top of the *biznaga*. Then he scooped a hole in its center and pounded the pulpy walls. Into the depression oozed a clear liquid that tasted flat as he swallowed a bit of it. He filled the canteen and passed it on to Marian.

Then from a mesquite Larry jerked clusters of ripe beans. Sickle-shaped pods and all he ground on a rock, and added to the last of the water in the *biznaga*.

"Mix this?" he requested Marian.

She nodded, her gray eyes lighting up, glad of a chance to help out even in this little way. The mixture made a thick gruel rich in sugar. They soon ate their fill of it.

Then, on a limestone ledge, Larry found a clump of strawberry cactus. With a greasewood twig he whipped prickles off the small scarlet berries, and they all feasted on the juicy fruit. A thicket of prickly pear afforded them more long red berries; after the spines were off, they made a crisp sweet dessert.

"This is filling," Marian remarked, smiling. "But oh, how a thick, juicy steak would satisfy!"

She laughed, and they laughed with her. All three felt better now. Marian smoother her lustrous, bronzy hair, and with just a tiny bit of the precious water she freshened her face and throat. Done, she looked neat and radiant again, a joy to behold.

"Tomorrow," Larry announced as they sat around a tiny campfire, "we've got to quit this dodgin' to hide our tracks an' head straight for Delprieda Tank. It's the only water hole in reachin' distance."

Marian shivered; night had fallen and brought a cool breath across the desert.

"Larry," she said, "what's our chance of reachin' Tres Pinos safely?"

He hesitated to answer.

She cried out: "Oh, I'm not a child! Please, you *mustn't* try to be kind by keeping worries from me. I want to know exactly what we're up against, and to do my share of the grieving."

Larry looked at her, admiration in his eyes. This tall, ruddy-haired girl was no spoiled parlor pet, but a sturdy partner eager to carry her share of their trouble.

Then, his face stern, he replied: "Miss Hazlett, if Carson nabs us, he'll murder Doc an' me, an' make himself damn unpleasant to you."

"But why? *Why* murder Donald and you?"

"Quickest way to get rid of excess baggage, far as Doc is concerned. Me, I eased you out of their hands an' they want revenge."

"Even so," Marian argued, mystified and dismayed, "they surely have got more reason than that to follow us so long and so far? This trip's no pink tea for anybody!"

"They *have* got more reason," Larry affirmed. His tone was grim, his manner reluctant; but with the directness of a brave man facing a stern issue, he spoke on: "Plenty of it. Carson wants you, Miss Hazlett. Also, he wants something else—an' his whole gang want something else. Something they'd chase me clear to the edge of the desert for. What it is, I'd rather not tell you. It concerns my brother, Ross, an' a promise I made to him. It stabs pretty deep. . . . But here is something I do want to tell you: as long as that pack of desert bandits have a sign to follow, as long as they have a hoss to ride an' a gun to shoot, they'll chase after

us. Right now, they're like wolves whose guts are twisted with famine, an' to them we're meat just over the hill."

He let this sink in, then spoke on.

"Tomorrow, the three of us have got a mighty hard trip to Delprieda Tank. If we *do* make it there, that's no guarantee we'll find water! The tank might be dry. What's more, Carson may have been foxy enough not to try to track us—but to send riders to all the water holes to trap us. Chances are big that we'll walk smack into an ambush. . . . See what a jack-pot we're in? We're like the boy that stood on the burnin' deck—all we can do is shut our eyes an' jump, an' pray that we don't drop into the fire! Now let's sleep. We're hittin' the trail before sun-up."

It was, in fact, a couple hours before dawn that Larry woke Marian and Doc Willis.

They started westward, and made good time in the cool of the night. But when the sun came up like a blaze of fire and sprayed its terrific heat on them, they had to slacken their pace.

Marian and the doctor soon emptied the canteen. By noon Marian was lightheaded with fever and thirst. Doc Willis trudged along beside her bronc as if in a daze. Mercilessly Larry kept them moving on; Marian guessed that he did not let them halt for rest because he knew he might not be able to start them on again. . . .

Late in the afternoon they saw a tall dust banner against the sky to the north. Larry halted, stared, muttered to himself. He knew that sign meant horsemen loping toward a straggling line of hills up ahead—toward Delprieda Tank.

He said nothing, however; just started on again. Now it was too late to retreat. Marian and the doctor were too dead beat to ask him questions.

Nearing those hills, Larry took the rifle from under Marian's saddle, and strode on in advance. Delprieda Tank lay in a barren canyon that pierced far into the heart of the sprawling little Saguaro Range.

Into this winding canyon Larry stalked, alert for a harsh command to halt or the heavy bark of a six-gun.

Around the first bend he led the way; above them, the canyon sides straightened into sheer cliffs, sand-blasted, terraced with hungry-windowed ruins of old cliff dwellings, and crested with turrets and palisades of fiery-hued rock.

Past a second curve in the serpentine canyon Larry led Marian and the doctor, and still they were not halted by a gun shot. So Larry went on toward a third bend in the close-walled valley. Wisely he slackened his pace. Hardly breathing, pulse hammering in his temples, he was in a fever of suspense. The water hole was just beyond this angle; if they were going to have trouble, it would avalanche onto them in the next thirty seconds. Marian's bronc smelled water, for it lifted its head and nickered and abruptly speeded up and carried Marian close behind Larry.

Around that bend they proceeded.

There ahead of them was Delprieda Tank, water glistening bright in the sun—and a stone barrier over which two rifles were laid, and behind which two men waited.

One of them pressed trigger. A spurt of smoke, a crashing bang that reverberated in the canyon—and Marian's bronc reared high, screaming, and pitched to its knees and slumped to the ground. Marian fell from the saddle but rolled clear.

"Doc!" Larry yelled. "Carry her back around the bend!"

Larry jammed rifle to shoulder and took quick aim. Already a second slug hissed past his head. He fired; rock splinters spat from that barrier top, and one of the outlaw pair let out a howl of pain. It was too hearty for him to have been badly hurt, however; Larry was not surprised when both of Carson's men cut loose at him. A bullet slashed through his bat wing chaps, another kicked up dirt at his feet. And a third slug struck him a terriffic blow

on the right side that staggered him.

He clapped hand to his side, and laughed shakily. That bullet had smacked into his holster and ripped it clean off his belt, six-gun in it. Hastily he stooped, picked up his forty-five, and then ran back around the canyon bend to join Marian and the doctor.

"Larry," Marian cried, her gray eyes dark with fright, "what'll we do *now*?"

"We're in a jam," he confessed. "As long as those two hombres stick behind that rock barricade, they're safe. We can't lick 'em—an' we can't reach water."

She gazed at him; his face was so grim and foreboding that she turned to Willis with a little cry of despair and wept in his arms.

"Webb," the doctor pressed, "isn't there any other well we can make it to?"

"None." Larry's answer was positive. "Not without water—not without horses than can outrun Carson's broncs."

Doc Willis looked off into the distance, thinking hard, facing facts squarely in his mind.

An unutterable weariness in his tone, he declared: "To go on from here means to wander off into the desert an' die of thirst. To *stay* here means just waitin' until Carson an' his bandits show up an' capture us. Either way, we lose. So—so we might as well give up now. We might as well surrender—an' get some water, pronto, to ease this damn burnin' in our throats!"

Emphatically, commandingly, Larry rejected this course.

"No, Doc! There's no sense in easin' our throats just to have 'em cut. We'll find some way to get water."

"How?"

"I got a plan—I got an idea. . . ."

He was silent a minute. Turning, he looked at the sun lowering in the west. Almost two hours of daylight were left.

"Come on," he ordered. "We got to work fast!"

Back out of the canyon they retraced their path. At the entrance, Larry climbed up the left wall and led the way along the west rim of the narrow valley.

An hour later, they stood on the crest of the canyon above Delprieda Tank.

Almost straight beneath them they saw that stone barrier and the two outlaws crouched behind it, rifles levelled; they saw the water hole. The bottom of Delprieda Tank was covered with water that reflected the skyline like a silver shield. Cool and sweet and unutterably inviting it looked to the three fugitives; unutterably inviting—and unutterably distant.

Larry told the other two: "We're goin' to that ledge a few yards below the summit here. Be careful!"

He lowered himself over the brink and slid lightly to that ledge. Turning, he helped Marian down. Then Willis started—slipped, and bounced onto the shelf like a trunk falling down stairs. Larry grabbed him just in time, so he didn't go over. But a bushel of small rocks did fall into the canyon, and from below came a yell of startled amazement.

"Oh, Lord!" groaned Larry. "Our surprise attack has had its teeth drawn!"

Rifle in hand, he carefully leaned over the ledge.

At the first glimpse of him the outlaws below pressed trigger. Hastily he lifted gun to shoulder and swung the muzzle down for a bead on a man almost beneath him. Before he could line up his sights a slug hissed past his face and a second bullet slashed his left forearm. Wisely he jumped back.

"No shootin' at 'em," he stated. "We have to lean over so far to aim that they can knock us off like clay pigeons."

Marian, her lovely face pale with concern, hastily bandaged his arm. Meanwhile Larry thought hard.

"Willis," he snapped, when Marian finished, "help me gather a pile of rocks. A big heap!"

On the lip of that ledge they collected a sizeable pyramid of rotten

granite, jagged fragments that would burst like bombs on smashing into a hard surface.

"All right, Doc!" Larry ordered breathlessly. "Over with all this stuff —right over the edge!"

Without exposing themselves to rifle fire from below, they shoved that whole mass of rocks off the shelf. Down it all plunged, banging against the steep slope, knocking more boulders loose so that presently a miniature avalanche was hurtling into the gorge. Stone crushed stone with a resounding smash that echoed and reverberated in the canyon. A cloud of dust exploded upward.

And after a few moments in which Marian imagined those two bandits, down below, pelted with flying fragments, stunned with surprise, utterly frozen in amazement—they answered with rifle talk. Bullets nicked viciously at the brink of the ledge and *whished* past.

"Stay away from the edge!" Larry warned. "Come on, Doc. We'll drop the stuff closer this time, an' chase those hyenas out of their hole!"

Once more they heaped up rocks and pushed them over, nearer that ambush. Once more the falling rocks started a slide. Once more a thunderous tumult of smashing stone arose, and a great pall of dust. . . . As the echoes of the crash faded, the fugitives heard a horse nicker shrilly, and heard a clatter of swift-beating hoofs.

Larry dropped onto his stomach and peered cautiously over the edge. Beyond the dust cloud in the canyon he saw the two outlaws riding out of the valley as fast as their broncs could leg it.

Hastily he stood up, lifted rifle to shoulder, aimed, pressed trigger. His gun spurted smoke; the foremost of those two bandits jerked up in saddle, slumped over his horse's neck and lunged head-first to the ground.

Larry drew a careful bead on the second man. His gun lashed out again. This time the bandit's horse pitched headlong into the dust, catapulting his rider from the saddle. The bandit hit the dirt, rolled over and over, bounced up onto his feet, ran alongside his dead partner's bronc, and made a flying mount into saddle.

Again and again Larry shot at him in a desperate effort to stop him, but he was out of effective range, and safely galloping away.

"Damn it all!" Larry raged. "He'll bring the whole gang onto us! It's signin' our death warrant not to stop him!"

Once more he shot at the fleeing bandit, but it was no use. He lowered his rifle and swore—heart-sick with dismay, angry at himself, he swore with fire and eloquence at the ill luck dogging his footsteps. . . . It did no good; but presently he felt better and quieted down.

In a low voice he said, "Let's go down to the water hole."

A couple hundred yards away was a steep mule-deer trail leading to the valley floor. Larry in advance, they climbed down. On the bottom, Larry ran to the water hole ahead of the other two.

Not until he reached the granite tank did he stop. Beside it he stood a moment, staring. And then something happened to him. His knees gave way under him and he crumpled down onto the rock and lay motionless.

Marian, following with the doctor, saw this; a cry escaped her and she started running. That wound of Larry's—the long trek—the strain of the fight—all must have culminated in a final shock of weariness that keeled him over like a blow. This she told herself; but on reaching the water hole she realized that there was another reason. Her own knees felt suddenly weak, and with a gasp of despair she clutched at Willis's arm to support herself.

Larry's shower of rock had driven off the two bandits.

Larry's shower of rock had filled up the water hole so that not a drop had

been saved. It might just as well have been dry.

CHAPTER VIII

Another Life

WHEN Larry came to his senses, he found himself lying on the ground, his head in Marian's lap; and she was crying as if her heart would break. Weeping over *him*. The thought brought with it a rare, tingling pleasure. Then he swore at himself for causing her worry.

"You mustn't c-cry over me," he stammered. "I'm—"

"Lie still!" she commanded as he tried to get up. Almost savagely she said: "Don't you *dare* move! And don't you dare say I mustn't cry over you! Here you've done all our thinking for us, all our worrying and fighting—and when you're hurt, you say I mustn't let it bother me! It does, and I will! From now on," she continued, in a calmer tone, though her gray eyes flashed she was so earnest, "I want you to realize that we're partners, Larry. You mustn't call me Miss Hazlett, ever. I'm Marian. Always! Just as you're Larry to me. Dr. Willis is Donald. And finally, you're not to take all our troubles onto yourself. We got backbones that can stiffen under grief, too. You hear? Let us do our share, or—off with your head!"

She smiled through her tears at him, robbing her severity of its sting. Obeying her, Larry rested where he was until he felt strong enough to navigate without sinking again. Then he insisted on rising.

"We got to look through this canyon for water," he said.

Painstakingly they searched the narrow valley for berries or cactus, anything that would relieve hunger and the sharp ache of thirst. But the place was barren and they found nothing.

Together they reached the mouth of the canyon and stared out over the desert, fear of pursuit like a ceaseless warning bell in their minds. . . . Sun was setting, and the undulant plain before them shone golden with light streaming on sandy swells.

In the southeast, against a sky all blue and flaming yellow, stood two high black columns of smoke.

"A signal!" Larry burst out. "That's a signal! The man who escaped is callin' the pack!"

Willis demanded huskily, "How soon can they get here?"

"They've got fast hosses," Larry answered. "Plenty water, too. The whole gang will lope into this canyon by tomorrow mornin'. They'll trail us. . . . We can't outrun 'em. We can't hide our tracks from 'em. All we can do—all we can do is put up a fight. . . . Us three against seven. . . ."

Dusk stalked over the desert and flung a chill night wind through the canyon. Larry built a little fire of mesquite roots, and they all lay down around it, grateful for its warmth.

Willis, exhausted, fell asleep. But Marian was too sensitive to their dangers for weariness to dull her mind so easily. Shaky with dread, she sat down close to Larry; he was so calm and resolute that strength seemed to radiate from him.

"Larry," she whispered, leaning close, "I'm scared—*scared!* Oh, it's hateful of me to be like this, but—"

Then she was in his arms, crying from wretched misery, her face pressed against his shoulder. . . . He let her weep, knowing she would feel better afterward. Presently she stopped, and looked up at him with a wan smile.

He grinned, rubbed his chin, and casually remarked, "I'd give a lot for soap an' water an' a razor."

She laughed lightly, as he had intended.

"Haven't you any tobacco?" she asked. "Light up, and talk to me a bit."

He was dog-tired, every muscle seemed full of glass darts that stabbed and tore; he bore it, however, for the pleasure of sitting side by side with Marian. He looked down at her, no-

ticed how the firelight played in bronzy gleams on her hair, noticed how long her eyelashes were and how sweet was the line of her profile and throat.

He filled a pipe, then spoke on in a low soothing murmur. Listening to his resonant voice, Marian felt her taut nerves relax and a luxurious torpor flow over her tired body.

"You know," Larry was saying, "it's funny what a hold the desert gets on you, it bein' so hot an' bare an' all. I cuss it an' hate it—an' yet I miss it when I'm away. When I was a kid I actually saw the big Sahara. It impressed me a heap, an' when I got home again I knocked together all sorts of mechanical camels to travel over dunes an' washes. Actually made a little cart on splay wheels I could run with pedals. Drove it out on the lawn one afternoon when my aunt was havin' a tea. Upset the tea table an' got a hot scoldin' from a governor's wife—seems like I ruined her dress. I quit inventin' sand-hoppers that same day. . . . When I got bigger, an uncle who bossed an army remount station gave me a saddle pony that was full Arabian. I nigh growed to that hoss. A friend borrowed him for an army polo game, finally. Sultan broke a leg. I've never watched a game of hossback croquet since."

"Oh, how terrible!" she sighed.

He gestured at the spangled sky.

"Out on the desert, stars seem twice as big an' twice as near." He pointed out the milky way to her, Orion, the big bear, dog star, dipper, pole star. He continued: "I was talkin' to a man who lived on a mountain top once. He had a big telescope an' was riding herd on a bunch of flighty stars that hadn't ever been branded. He told me that the star Mira—just a silver flicker when you see it—is five hundred times as big as the sun. It's ten times as hot as boilin' water, an' the stuff it's made of is so thin that our air is ten thousand times as thick as it is. Shucks, if you'd ask me, I'd say Mira was nothin' but a red-hot vacuum!"

"How queer!" she remarked, wondering at the things he must have done, the places he must have seen, to pile up knowledge like his. Then, not thinking at the moment how her query would hurt, she began, "Larry, you've done so much, and met so many men, surely you haven't always been—"

Then she hesitated, realizing.

"No," he answered tensely, "I haven't always been a thief and an outlaw with every man's hand against me." Abruptly he stopped; in a lighter tone he said, "I'm keepin' you up too long. Better sleep now, because I'll wake you in just a couple of hours. We got to travel as far as possible by daybreak."

Marian lay down near the fire and stretched out comfortably. Musing in that dusk before sleep darkens the mind, she wondered about Larry. . . . Though he was an outlaw now, his past was not one long record of camp and corral, of horses he had ridden and men he had fought—he had read books, Larry had, and been friends with men wise in school learning. It wasn't every youngster who was lucky enough to see the big Sahara, or have an Arab saddler of his own. And fewer still ever got a hot scolding from a governor's wife!

Larry had a fine background. Why, of why, was he an outlaw now? There was nothing vicious in him; of this she was mortally certain. He hated lawless wandering over the desert. He despised Carson and his band of—"hyenas," Larry had called them. So why had he become a member of Carson's gang? Why was Larry a bandit hunted by the law? What was back of this mystery? What disaster, what grotesque gesture of fate had made a gunfighting badman of him?

She recalled Larry's brother, Ross Webb. Thought of him raised more disturbing questions. What had made a desperado of Ross Webb? What secret had he passed on to Larry when he lay dying? And what sort of promise had Ross exacted from Larry just before he died? What job had Larry

solemnly promised his brother that he would do?—"and do *right*, in spite of hell an' high water!"

Marian realized she could answer none of these riddles.

Dreamily she told herself that Larry, with his calm, resolute spirit, his lean good looks, was just the sort of man she could love with all her heart.

"But he's the last man in the world I'd pick!" she amended fiercely. "He's a thief—an outlaw. . . . Anyway, I'm engaged to Donald. I made a promise. So I—I'll keep it!"

For some reason, tears flooded her eyes; and she wept until fatigue, like the soft hand of a kindly nurse, calmed her troubled nerves and soothed her into sleep.

CHAPTER IX

The Sacrifice

IT seemed but a moment later when Larry wakened her.

"Time for us to move on, Marian."

She rose. Doc Willis was already up.

"Larry," he asked, "honestly, what're our chances of gettin' away from Carson?"

"No better than our chances to find water."

"Which are?"

"Slim. Mighty slim. But anyway," Larry shrugged and his face hardened, "we'll keep dodgin' that he-wolf till we drop."

Through the canyon they trudged, and headed due north over the great round of the desert again. To Marian, the night seemed vast and lonely and unutterably weird, laced with fantasy by a bulbous desert moon. . . .

Dawn came, flinging amber and smoldering scarlet across the east; then the sun rose, a disc of liquid fire that sprayed heat like a shower of meteors.

They trudged on over a flat lake bed, huge, barren, salt-encrusted. Rings and bands and scarves of heat wavered across this waste, shimmering and opalescent. Far off, desert and sand whirls moved slowly in tall columns half a mile high, shining like shafts of marble in the sunlight. Majestically they swept along, feet upon earth, heads towering in the sky.

The sun dazzle was terrific. There was no relief from the brazen glare that struck at Marian's eyes. Nor was there escape from the heat radiating from the sands; it seemed to pierce her body with a million needles of fire. With it came the dread "cottonmouth" thirst. Every muscle ached with the need for water. Every raw nerve twanged with pain. Tongue and throat were shot with torment. And on her mind depression settled like some leprous sickness. . . . It seemed as if all that was alive in her had shrunk to a tiny knot far inside a gray, oppressive mist. From then on she remembered little except that Larry walked at her side, held her arm, braced her, helped her. . . .

Late in the afternoon the three fugitives halted on a low rise.

Larry pointed northward.

"That's Saguaro Pass," he said, his words thick, rasping. "We'll find shade there, an' we'll rest."

Marian roused herself to look. The sun shone fire-red through a pink haze, and broad bands of hot color streamed across the sky as the terrible day neared its close. Northward, mountains of porphyry bent upward from a yellow sea, minaret peaks shining like brassy spear points against the sky. Saguaro Pass was a V-shaped cut in that rampart of mountains straight ahead, the Big Saguaro Range.

They shambled on, too worn to talk.

And finally they plodded into Saguaro Pass. The gap was miles in length, but only a few hundred yards wide. Its floor was not level, but pitched up at a steep grade. So steep, in fact, that Larry halted to rest at the very entrance of the high-walled gorge, lacking heart to push on just then.

Marian and Doc Willis sat down, numb with weariness. Larry turned for a look-see over the desert they had just crossed.

"Look!" he rasped suddenly, and in his voice was so much of alarm and dismay that the others jerked up and gazed where he pointed.

Out over the sandy basin, back on the very trail they had walked, ominously plain against the sky, stood a long gray banner of dust.

"That's Carson an' his gang!" Larry whipped out. "We're only four hours' travel from the cowtown of Los Algadones—only four hours from help. But Carson will reach us in less than half that time!"

"Good Lord, man!" Willis gasped. "Can't we dodge him?"

"No, we can't sidestep that gang. There's nowhere to hide in this pass—it's straight an' smooth an' steep-sided as a flume. Nor can we run off from those hombres, us afoot an' them mounted on fast broncs!"

"Oh, Larry," Marian begged, "what *can* we do?"

"First off, we're so dead tired that we simply got to rest here a spell. Then we'll go on, in the hope"—she knew instinctively that he was groping to find a single hope to give her, though at heart he felt none at all—"that we run into someone who can help us. Lie down, now, an' soak up all the rest you can in a little while."

Willis groaned, and stretched out. Marian, too, lay down, and it was a blessed relief to ease her aching muscles. Larry sat beside her.

He handed her his six-gun.

"Here, Marian," he whispered tensely, "you take this. I'll be usin' the rifle. You know, we might have a ruckus with Carson's outfit. In case we do, why, you can help me; an' if we don't lick 'em—well, you save the last bullet for—for—"

He could not put what he meant into words.

"I understand, Larry," Marian said, her voice quite steady. "And—thanks."

Marian did not sleep, but lay awake. She saw Larry rise to his feet presently, and stalk up the pass with his canteen.

A little later she heard a queer, hoarse shout from him, and saw him coming back at a tottery run.

"I found a *biznaga* cactus!" he yelled. "We can drink!"

He handed her the canteen, and bent to waken the doctor. Drinking slowly, they all eased their thirst. . . . Larry made a little campfire, for dusk had darkened into night, against the west wall of the pass; over them, the high granite cliffs loomed black and forbidding.

Marian relaxed again and presently fell asleep.

For some time she slept without a break. Then a curious dream troubled her. It seemed that Larry rose from his place near the fire, that he picked up the canteen and drank long from it, that he came toward her, moving with shadowy stealth, and bent over her and took back that pistol he had given her earlier in the evening. It actually seemed that he bent so close that she could feel his breath on her cheek, and that he kissed her gently. So real was that kiss, so tender, so sure a promise of deep affection, that it gave her a thrill of happiness—of happiness so keen she was startled and dismayed.

She woke up. She looked toward the fire for Larry. But he was gone. Startled, a feeling of utter disaster upon her, she peered around camp for him. He was nowhere in sight. With a choking cry she reached for the pistol he had given her. *But that six-gun, too, was gone.*

There was no doubt of it. Half awake, half asleep, she had been aware of Larry bending over her, taking back his pistol, and kissing her before he left.

Where had he gone? Why had he quit them without a word of warning or farewell? Why had he stolen away like a man with a guilty secret?

She quit thinking of him to realize what an avalanche of trouble was poised over her and Donald. In less than an hour she and the doctor would be captured by Buck Carson. Donald

would be killed. She herself—well, after a brutish quarrel, she would be taken by the strongest one of that band of hold-ups. Possibly without even the sad courtesy of being won in a gamble. Without even the sad escape that a last bullet in Larry's six-gun might have offered her.

He had kissed her, Larry, as if he loved her—yet he deserted her when she needed him most. And he had been so low, so treacherous, as to take back that pistol he had given her. This was despicable. This she could not forgive.

Rising, she woke Doc Willis and told him that Larry had run out on them.

The doctor went pale with anger.

"That dirty, low-down thief!" he raged. "That back-stabbin' Apache! See how he figured, Marian? Buck Carson will catch us. His men will be so satisfied with grabbing us two without bloodshed that they won't bother to chase after Larry Webb. He'll get off scot free—that blasted coward!"

Marian had already guessed that this was Larry's reason for abandoning them; nevertheless it hurt terribly when the doctor repeated it. She sat down by the fire, crushed, heart-sick. How *could* Larry have done such a thing? To save himself at the price of sacrificing her and Donald to those bandits was so hateful, so craven, so unutterably selfish! . . .

"Donald," she asked wearily, "what next for us?"

"Let's hike on toward town," he answered. "Damn that man Webb! I knew there was no loyalty, no honor, in a thief!"

He picked up the canteen, and they started climbing Saguaro Pass.

The slope was rocky, and very steep; in their weakened condition it took them almost an hour to climb a quarter mile. Then they paused.

"Let's have a drink, Marian," Willis suggested. "I'm nigh done up. We—we haven't much chance, dear. Larry Webb's hurry about leavin' us in the lurch means that those bandits are close behind."

He opened the canteen and handed it to her. She lifted it to her lips, tilted it.

But no water came out. Not even when she turned it upside down.

"Why, Donald, what's wrong?"

He took the canteen, stuck a finger inside—and pulled out a strip of rag, then another, and still another.

"That dirty slinker wolf!" he gasped. "Larry drank all the water we had left, an' then stuffed this canteen with rags an' pebbles to make it seem full because of its weight. Of all the low-down Injun tricks—"

He slammed the canteen to the ground, and choked—at a loss for words strong enough and sulphurous enough to voice his rage and disgust. To Marian, this trick was the last straw. This was the final link in a chain of treachery that damned Larry Webb in her mind. No longer was she mystified by the fact that Larry was an outlaw. It was in him to be vicious. He was not a bandit because of some tragic accident or for the sake of some grim purpose, but by natural bent. . . .

And then something happened.

Marian started in fright, and Doc Willis turned around suddenly as if someone had tapped him on the shoulder. Together they stared down the pass, back the way they had come. Together they searched the moon-misted darkness, and listened intently for a sound borne to them on the wind.

Again came that sharp bang, like the crack of a whip. And a quarter mile below, close to where their camp had been, they saw a rope of flame lash out into the night.

Spurts of yellow-scarlet answered it—like fiery spokes of a wheel, or rather half a wheel. Seven men, scattered in a half circle, were being held at bay in the narrow pass by one rifleman.

"Donald!" Marian gasped, the truth flashing upon her. "We're wrong about Larry! Don't you see? He left us—but he went back to stop Carson's men so that you and I could escape! He must have taken that pistol he gave me to help him in the fight. Larry didn't

leave us to save himself!" she exclaimed, her glad relief at odds with the fact that Larry was one man fighting seven. "He's sacrificing himself to give us a chance to escape!"

CHAPTER X

The Attack

BUT Willis was not so sure.

"Larry ran into that gang by accident, that's all. He's fightin' to save his own neck. Come on, Marian! let's get away from here!"

She stared at him, aghast, unbelieving.

"Leave him? Now? Run off and let him face those men *alone* after what he's done for us?" she demanded. Laying her slim hands on his arm, she pleaded: "Donald, listen! Larry has an extra gun. You go down there to him. I'll run on to Los Algadones and send a posse galloping back here as soon as humanly possible. You join Larry!"

"I guess not!" Willis snapped. "Go back an' die beside a thief in a thief's squabble? I won't do it!"

"But, Donald!" she cried, her lips quivering. "Larry is back there alone, fighting seven men just to save our miserable lives. We can't run off and leave him in a trap! Please, Donald, *please* go to him and—"

"No! You're not talkin' sense. I won't side with him in that fight."

"Then," she said, her tone ominously quiet, "*I* will."

"You're crazy!" he gasped. "The sun's turned your head, Marian!"

"I'm sensible. Larry and I may be able to hold off that gang until you come with help."

"Is it sensible," he demanded fiercely, "to leave a sure chance for life to go back to a thief and—and certain death, or worse? You're makin' a mistake. You think you owe Larry something. Forget it, Marian! You're engaged to me. Stick with the man you love!"

"You believe," she asked, her voice low and vibrant, a flash in her gray eyes, "that I should make my choice and stay with the man I love?"

"Of course, Marian!"

"All right. I'll do it. I love Larry Webb. I'm going to join him."

Turning, she darted back down the slope toward that gun battle in the pass below.

LARRY had a bullet in his left shoulder that was giving him fits. So when he heard a voice calling his name, a girl's voice, *Marian's*, he wondered if something was wrong with his head. Looking back, in the moonlight he saw Marian running down the rocky slope toward him. The outlaws noticed her at the same time, for a couple of rifles spoke and bullets struck puffs of white from stones near her feet.

A couple of seconds later she dropped down beside Larry, back of his rock barrier.

"What under the vaulted heavens brought *you* here?" he gasped. "Why didn't you trot on to town with Doc Willis?"

"I—I came," she panted, "to get back—that gun you gave me. You said I might need it—to help you."

"You're a real partner," he told her huskily, his eyes shining, "but you can't stay, Marian. This is a losin' game; so—"

She placed her fingers over his lips, and said: "I'm staying. So please give me that six-gun."

He realized that she was determined, in serious earnest. He gave her the weapon then, and warily showed her where Carson's men lurked.

Larry's "fort" was a rough wall of stone piled loosely, a crescent in shape, located in the middle of the pass. For a space of thirty yards on either side and a hundred yards in front, the ground was level and barren and white with moonlight. It was a strategic spot from which to block passage of invaders into the gap. This fact, and the rampart of boulders Larry had heaped up, proved to Marian that he had come here on purpose to fight off Carson's

band, while she and Doc Willis escaped.

"The gang," Larry warned her, "is scattered in the greasewood an' mock willow on the far side of the open space up in front. They're tryin' to Injun through the scrub oak linin' the walls of this canyon an' get around in back of us. We *got* to keep 'em from sneakin' past."

She understood why: as long as the outlaws were in front, she and Larry were protected by their barricade; but once the bandits flanked them, they would have no shelter because their "fort" was open at the rear.

Larry raised up and peered over the rampart, rifle levelled. A thirty-thirty flashed in the darkness up ahead and a slug ricocheted over the barricade, kicking stone splinters onto Larry. He fired back. By the flashes, in the next couple of minutes, Marian located five of the outlaws. Larry told her seven men were hidden out there, and to look sharp for two hombres up to some dirty work.

For a while no one pulled trigger.

The moon, arching toward the zenith, shone direct as a flood light into Larry's crescent-shaped "fort"—making them, Marian realized, fine targets for whoever might sneak around in back of them. . . . Quiet settled heavy and brooding over the pass. This calm troubled Larry. He kept peering over the rampart as if suspecting that the silence covered some treacherous move.

Suddenly a rifle snapped, from the greasewood thickets up in front. Larry quivered; a gasp escaped him. He whipped the thirty-thirty to shoulder and fired back at the flash of the other man's weapon. A loud, derisive yell answered his shot, and then guns spoke from five different points in the chaparral.

"Larry," Marian demanded, heart thumping, "are you hurt?"

"No, but if I'd been broad in the cheek-bones I'd surely have got a shave. Keep down, honey! Those hombres are wastin' so much lead they must be tryin' to hide some sort of coyote trick. Watch that scrub oak thicket linin' the wall to your left. Shoot at anything that moves, pronto!"

He had had to shout his words because of the bang of rifle fire. A couple of slugs hissed overhead; three-four bullets spanged onto the rock and ricocheted off with a scream.

"They'll quit wastin' cartridges presently," Larry spoke in Marian's ear. "They'll lie low for a spell, workin' themselves up to a charge an' lettin' us get sleepy. Then of a sudden they'll whoop down on us like Piutes. Maybe they'll wait till the moon sets an' it's darker. . . . Honey, we haven't any more shots for your pistol. Be sparin' with what's in your gun, an' save that last bullet!"

As he foretold, Carson's men quit shooting presently. Again the night became deathly quiet. A poorwill called, just twice, its mournful whistle sounding lonely and distant. Then silence flowed into Saguaro Gap like a shadowy river. Over the sky spread a filmy gauze of clouds, muffling the moonlight; and in the canyon the night was full of shadows that grimaced and threatened like things with burning eyes and lashing tails. Time dragged, hours agonizing past like cripples. Waiting in taut suspense for an attack to come avalanching down on them began to tell on Marian's nerves; though Larry was so close she could touch him with outstretched hand, she quivered like a violin string when high up the notch a panther screamed. She saw menace in every shadow.

Opposite her, in the scrub oak thicket to the left, it seemed that two men were crawling past on hands and knees; but so vague, to formless were the shapes that she *knew* they were only shadows. Yet fear aroused her to such tension that she realized she would scream unless something happened. So she raised her pistol and fired at the foremost of the black figures, her gun report shattering the quiet like rock splintering glass.

She shot once—and when those two shadows leaped up and blazed away with their own guns as they retreated, she fired again and a third time. Larry snapped rifle to shoulder and squeezed trigger.

A stricken yell burst from the rearmost bandit; as if a mule had kicked him in the shoulder he staggered and slumped face down in the dust. His partner ran like a scared deer back to the thickets hiding the gang. From them came wrathful, threatening yells and a wild salvo of rifle talk more deafening than deadly. Presently they realized that they were wasting lead, and stopped shooting. Sullen quiet again flowed into the pass.

"Marian," Larry cautioned, "watch close now. Buck Carson is full of plans an' stratagems. His outfit may swarm onto us any time now, for the moon's gettin' low. Remember, save that last bullet! Carson mustn't get you."

Again a period of anxious vigil, a taut, heart-breaking wait for the attack that *must* come. . . . Weariness was a drug that knifed through her muscles and left them flabby with weakness; weariness was a horde of blue devils that blinded her eyes and filled her ears with thundering silence and stabbed her worn body with a thousand pinpricks of anguish. And time was a monstrous black snail crawling up a black mountain at a pace so slow he never left *now* for *then*. . . . But finally, in the east, she saw a sword of pale silver slash across the murky sky. Day was coming. In spite of herself, Marian relaxed; with a sob she laid down her six-gun and lowered her head into her hands—

At this moment the attack came.

Larry's rifle lashed out like a crack of doom.

"Marian!" he snapped. "They're comin'!"

She seized her pistol, and raised up to look over the barrier.

A patter and thump of running feet. In the shadowy space before their barricade, Marian saw six stooped, darting, zigzagging figures charging down on their "fort." Those men carried pistols instead of unwieldy rifles. They had fired no guns to betray their advance, and now they were almost at the barricade!

At Larry's shot, the foremost figure straightened up with a yell and blazed away with his forty-five. The rest did likewise, sending bullet after bullet at the rampart to force the two defenders to lie low.

From Larry's rifle spurted ropes of fire, lashing out as swiftly as he could pull trigger. That foremost attacker suddenly faltered in his stride, and pitched headlong to the ground. Marian, keyed up to an unendurable tension, shot once, remembered she had but two cartridges left, and waited.

At Larry's fourth shot another outlaw stumbled, but caught himself and came on. Then five of the gang, Buck Carson among them, reached the barrier. A bullet from Larry's gun struck Carson in the shoulder and knocked him spinning to the dirt; but he lurched erect just as Red Burnett made a flying leap over the barricade, his forty-five roaring out. Marian and Larry both snapped a bullet at him, and Burnett crashed to earth like a falling tree. Another bandit sprang over the rampart, and two others, Carson close behind them, ran around the end of the "fort" toward Larry.

To her horror, Marian saw that Larry was drawing back, rising to his feet, clubbing his rifle—his gun was empty!

His arms swung out; and that hombre buck-jumping over the rampart caught the butt of Larry's rifle square on the chest with an impact that knocked him flat to the dust. Force of his swing sent Larry stumbling to his knees.

In a flash Marian realized that she and Larry had lost. Two men had rounded the barricade and were springing at Larry, and Buck Carson was lunging toward her. Without hesitating, she lifted her six-gun to her bosom,

muzzle against her heart. That last bullet should serve its purpose.

Then she saw one of Larry's attackers stop just out of reach of Larry's clubbed rifle, and raise his six-gun for pointblank aim at Larry. She even recognized that man, Tex Hawn.

For a split instant of time Marian wavered: that last bullet—for herself?—or to help Larry?

She swung her pistol around and shot at Hawn.

The outlaw jerked up onto his toes; the pistol fell, unfired, from his nerveless fingers and he pitched forward to the ground.

Marian whirled to face Carson. Her six-gun was still in her grasp, and Carson, not knowing it was empty, struck her and tore the weapon from her hand. And Marian, just before she sank into a black peaceful oblivion, saw Larry go down, staggered by a blow on the temple from a pistol barrel. His attacker lifted the six-gun again, and again his arm came down, metal shining with a sinister gleam in the dim light. . . .

CHAPTER XI

Rescued—For the Noose

IT was past midnight, and the poker game in the sheriff's office in the cowtown of Los Algadones was rising to a hot climax. That grizzled old manhunter, Sheriff Jim Hardin, held three aces and two queens; a rich pot lay on the table, and five opponents in reckless mood sat around him. Hardin was keyed up for *hiyu* slaughter.

But an interruption occurred. An urgent fist beat upon the front door, and a strained voice called for the sheriff.

"Hardin! Sheriff Hardin!"

He stiffened in his chair. A call for him—at midnight!

"Hell's blue blazes!" he grumbled. "No sooner do I get lucky but trouble comes a-yelpin'!"

With the rest—his deputy, a couple of waddies, two hard-rock men from the Ophir diggings—he shoved back from the table. Springing to the door, Hardin opened it and admitted the stranger.

He looked like trouble, sure enough, this hombre who staggered in and had to be helped to a chair. His stocky figure drooped with exhaustion. Alkali dust lay thick on his boots and dark suit, and lined his face and powdered his hair. A merciless sun had burned his skin, and his brown eyes were taut with that poignancy of gaze which comes to one who has looked long on the mad fantasies of thirst delirium.

"What's wrong, hombre?" Hardin demanded. "Who're you?"

"I'm Doc Willis, of Tres Pinos. Sheriff, you've got to ride to Saguaro Gap with a posse! Right away, pronto! Buck Carson's desperados have trapped a man an' a girl in the pass, an' they'll kill 'em if you don't stop it!"

Hardin turned and snapped orders at the other men. They ran from the office.

"Doc," Hardin asked, "who're the two folk bein' massacred?"

"Marian Hazlett of Tres Pinos, an' Larry Webb."

"*Larry Webb?*" ejaculated Hardin. "Where's his brother, Ross?"

"Dead. I was called out into the desert, with Miss Hazlett, to take care of a wounded man. We found him with Carson's gang. He was Ross Webb, an' though we tried to save him, he—died."

"Lucky for him!" Hardin growled. "He an' Larry Webb were due to hang together if the law caught 'em. Now Larry will have to do a rope dance by his lonesome."

Willis stared at the sheriff, almost bowled over by this announcement.

"But w-why," he stammered. "*Why* should Larry Webb be hung?"

"He an' Ross Webb shot a banker in town here, some months ago, an' stole ten thousand dollars. . . . The man's widow went out of her head an' ain't been right since. Whole town was cut up by that murder."

"Good God, is that right?" Willis breathed.

"Sure is! He's one bad actor, that Webb hombre."

Slumping down in his chair, Willis murmured dazedly, "So Larry Webb is a thief, a bank robber—an' a killer. . . . Poor Marian!"

Hardin's deputy burst into the office.

"Sheriff, I got a dozen men armed an' mounted!"

Hardin grabbed up his holster and buckled it on.

"Sheriff," Willis asked, "if you get to Saguaro Gap in time to save Larry an' Miss Hazlett, you'll bring Larry back here to be—hung?"

"That's right, Doc. He's got it comin' to him."

"Hardin, I'm ridin' to Saguaro Gap with you."

The sheriff nodded and ordered his deputy, "Jack, rustle a bronc for Doc Willis!"

A few minutes later the posse galloped south on the trail to Saguaro Gap.

IT was daylight when Marian came to her senses. She found herself lying on a blanket beside Larry's "fort." Her head ached abominably, and her hands and feet were numb from ropes that bound them.

Some yards away, Larry sat on a flat rock, also with his ankles tied and wrists made fast behind his back. In front of him stood Buck Carson, left shoulder awkwardly bandaged, and two of his men. One of the latter kept a hand to his chest, as if trying to ease the kick of a broken rib.

Carson was brandishing a heavy quirt in Larry's face and gritting threats.

"You're goin' to tell," he was raving, "or I'll lambast you with this rawhide till your meat's hangin' in shreds, an' then we'll stake you out on an ant hill! Now where is it?"

Larry's answer was a wan, impudent grin.

Almost beside himself with fury, Carson brought his lash hissing through the air down onto Larry's neck and cheek in a blow that left a bloody welt.

Marian screamed.

"Carson!" she cried out. "Carson! You've caught me now—let Larry go!"

He turned and glared at her.

"Havin' *you*," he mocked, "I couldn't want anything else, huh? Listen, you little she-fox! My outfit didn't chase you all across the desert for three days for *you*. T'hell with you! When we get through with Webb, we'll have time for flossies!"

"What you want from Larry? What's he done?"

"We want ten thousand dollars he's hid somewheres. An' if we don't get it, pronto," he was facing Larry now, shaking a great hairy fist under Larry's nose, "I'm goin' to skin you alive with this quirt! Now *where's—that—cash?*"

"Carson," Larry answered with the quiet weariness of one repeating a thing for the dozenth time to a dumb child, "that money isn't yours. It never was yours. You haven't got one solitary right to a penny of it. None of your men have. So—"

"Don't preach to me, damn you! Where's that money?"

"I haven't got it."

"Where is it then?"

"By now it's in the sheriff's office at Los Algadones."

"*Wha-a-at?*" Carson gasped. "How come?"

"While the girl an' I held you all blocked in this pass last night, Doc Willis kept ramblin' on. He took the money with him."

For a moment Carson looked as if he would burst; then, with a bitter, savage oath, he brought his quirt slashing down across Larry's chest.

"I'm keepin' my promise, you damn wolf!" he raged, whipping back and forth across Larry's body in a fury of smashing blows. "I'll tear the hide off'n you an' stake your carcass to an ant hill!"

"Stop!" Marian screamed. "I'll tell you where that money is! Donald didn't take it to Los Algadones!"

The outlaws turned on her.

"If," Carson grunted, "you're lyin' to save Webb some leather tonic, you'll get a larrupin' yourself. Talk up!"

"Dr. Willis didn't take any money with him. He said nothing about it, and I know his pockets were empty. He had nothing to carry a lot of money in—not unless it was packed into a canteen. And he dropped that canteen a quarter mile up the pass from here. It's still there!"

Carson whirled on Larry.

"Did you pack that money into a canteen, hombre?"

"You," said Larry, "may go straight to hell."

Carson let out a roar and lifted his quirt. But one of his men grabbed it.

"Come on, chief! Let's find that canteen. Webb will be waitin' here when we get back!"

He and his partner turned and started running up the slope. Carson stared after them a moment, then flung a venomous look at Larry, and abruptly ran after his men.

"Marian," Larry asked, "can you get loose?"

"No, Larry, I can't—I can't!"

"Neither can I."

"Larry, if they come back with the money, will they let you go?"

"No. Carson will make me one of those men who tell no tales. He'll shoot me."

"Oh! . . . Did you put that money in the canteen?"

"I did."

"Why? And—and where in the world, Larry, did you—"

"Get ten thousand dollars?" he finished, when she hesitated. "I didn't steal it. Listen, Marian. . . . I've got an older sister. She an' Ross an' I lived on our ranch near Salome. Nancy left us to marry a banker in Los Algadones named Bixel. He was a big, handsome hombre, liked by everybody who didn't know his habit of sneakin' off on a lone spree. A couple of shots of whiskey under his belt an' he was as mean as a squaw-beatin' Piute."

Larry paused to catch his breath; with a pang Marian realized that he was weak and sore from his wounds.

He resumed: "We didn't know he was mistreatin' Nancy for quite a while. Then her baby died, an' she got sickly. I went to see her one day; came in, an' found Bixel larrupin' her. He was crazy drunk. Plumb ory-eyed. I told him what for, an' knocked him down. He came up with a gun, shootin' wild. I jumped him. In the scuffle he got a slug through the chest. A bullet creased Nancy, too, but not bad. She fainted.

"Ross came runnin' into the room an' saw the gun dropped from Bixel's hand. Then in barged the sheriff. Bixel died right away. He spoke just three words, the rat. He said: 'Webb killed me.'

"Ross—he could think fast, Ross could. Pronto he got the drop on the sheriff. Then bendin' down, he searched through Bixel's pockets an' pulled out his wallet. Takin' this, snappin' at me to keep my mouth shut, he ran out, forked his bronc, an' made a getaway. . . . You see, Ross figured I'd got mad an' killed Bixel. So, by pretendin' *he*, Ross, had shot Bixel in order to rob him of that money, Ross was doin' his damndest to save me. . . . How come Bixel had ten thousand dollars in that wallet on him, nobody knows; but later it was found out that his accounts at the bank were short, an' we suspect he was figurin' to jump the Border with a load of his bank's money.

"Anyway, Sheriff Hardin was mad as blazes. He arrested me, an' swore up an' down that Ross an' I were in cahoots to kill Bixel an' steal that money."

"But why," Marian demanded, "didn't your sister tell him the truth?"

"She couldn't. Nancy had been ailin'. So when her husband beat her, an' then tangled with her own brother, an' died before her eyes, an' even creased her with a bullet—well, the shock was too much for her; somethin' snapped in her mind. She's been sort of stunned ever since. Can't remember a thing."

"So what did you do, Larry?"

"I told Sheriff Hardin the truth. Argued with him. Finally he agreed to clear Ross if *I* would stand trial for murderin' Bixel, an' if Ross would return the stolen money.

"My waddies were in town, an' that night they broke me out of jail. I set out to trail Ross, an' found him with Buck Carson's gang.

"But he wouldn't give me that money to take back to Los Algadones. An' he wouldn't hear to my goin' back to be hung for murder. I was innocent, he said; Bixel was a dirty so-and-so, and he, Ross, was proud to be blamed for killin' him. . . . I stayed with Carson's gang, hopin' to make Ross change his mind; unless that ten thousand was returned, if ever Ross was caught by the law he'd be hung."

"Did he change his mind?"

"Yes. Just before he—died. He gave me that money, an' told me to return it to the Los Algadones bank in spite of hell or high water. He said to look out for Carson, because he had already tried to steal it for himself—only Ross had fooled him. Last night, when I decided to stay here in the gap, I put that cash into Doc Willis's canteen, with a note, an' packed it all tight."

Larry quit talking suddenly. Both he and Marian turned their heads and stared up the pass. From that direction, borne faintly on the wind, came a medley of yells and a vicious spattering of gunshots.

"It's a fight!"

"Donald's returned!" Marian cried. "It *must* be he. He's come back from Los Algadones with help, and they've run into Carson and his two men!"

It *was* Doc Willis who presently rode down the gap toward them; behind him came Sheriff Hardin, his posse, and three captives—Carson and his two partners. Tied to the horn of the sheriff's saddle was the canteen in which Larry had packed the stolen ten thousand.

Willis sprang from the saddle and ran to Marian.

"Thank God, you're safe!" he cried.

She and Larry were freed of the ropes binding them. Larry's hurts were bandaged. They were given water and food. Then Sheriff Hardin slipped handcuffs over Larry's wrists.

"Why are you doing that?" Marian demanded, her face suddenly pale.

"This man is wanted for murder," Hardin answered. "He got away from me once. I'm seein' that he don't do it again."

The deputies scattered and made sure that the fallen bandits were dead and beyond help, and searched them. Carson and his two remaining riders also were searched. And most of the money stolen from Dobe Monahan was recovered.

"Webb," Hardin remarked, as he placed the stolen cash in his pockets, "I don't reckon you aimed to help the law when you fought this outfit. But anyhow, Dobe Monahan owes you a heap of gratitude. . . . Not that gratitude will help you any when you come to trial!"

The horses belonging to Carson's men were rounded up. Larry and Marian were helped to mount, and the party got ready to start back to Los Algadones, all but two riders who stayed to bury the dead.

Doc Willis looked round at the scene of the last night's battle. At Carson and his bandaged shoulder, at his wounded men, haggard and blood-stained, at the still figures lying crumpled and twisted in death.

Willis drew a deep breath; in a low tone, echoing the grim thought of all present, he said: "The S.A.D. outfit is surely a *sad* outfit now!"

CHAPTER XII

Sealed Lips

LOS ALGADONES did not boast of a hospital, so Larry was permitted to go to his sister's home to recover from his wounds. Hardin posted a deputy in the house. Marian insisted on staying as nurse.

Under her care Larry mended fast. But once when Marian remarked that color had come into his lean cheeks and he was looking healthy, he answered with a wry grin, "Sure, bein' fattened for the slaughter." Marian choked and hurried from the room.

One evening, not long before Larry's trial, Marian was alone on the porch with his sister. She was a silent, white, and lovely figure of tragedy, Nancy Bixel. About thirty, tall and finely formed, she had sweet gray eyes and lustrous flaxen hair. She would have been a ravishing beauty, only something was dead within her; utterly drained of feeling, she seemed.

All day long she worked in her garden, which flourished under her care; or in her house, which was neat and spotless. She had made no sign of recognition when Larry was brought here, nor had she questioned the presence of Marian and the deputy. She never spoke unless spoken to first, and then she answered a bit dazedly, as if scared out of a day dream, in a voice as gentle and pallid as her face. . . .

Marian decided to question her. Nancy's story of how Ray Bixel had really been killed would save Larry from hanging. If only she could remember, if only she would talk!

"Nancy," Marian asked, "when did you last see Larry before we brought him here, two weeks ago?"

"Why, Marian," she answered, her eyes wide with surprise, "I *never* saw that man before you brought him here."

"But he's your brother! You've seen him a thousand times!"

"I never had a brother," Nancy returned, shaking her head, lips twitching in distress. "At least, I don't remember having one."

"Nancy, try to recall. Can't you remember your husband, Ray Bixel? Think hard, now!"

Nancy was astonished, and frightened. She whispered: "Was I ever married? People have tried to tell me so many things. But I can't remember —I can't remember!"

She burst into tears; so Marian left her, realizing that Nancy's lips were sealed on the past as effectively as if by death.

That night, Marian lay awake, pondering Larry's danger. An idea flashed into her mind. It was a plan to save Larry, to clear him of all accusation of murder. But so audacious a scheme was it, one fraught with so much risk, one that held such slight hope of success, that she quailed and shrank from it. If it failed, Marian knew she would feel as if her own hands had tightened the noose about Larry's throat; moreover, Nancy might be given serious trouble; and she, Marian, would have ugly charges placed against her by the law. . . . Until morning she lay awake, viewing her scheme from every angle. And finally, because it did hold out one slim chance of helping Larry, she decided to face its hazards and work the plan.

After breakfast, she sent the deputy to Sheriff Hardin with word for him to come and get Larry; the prisoner was now well enough to leave the hospital and sit in jail.

Hardin came. Marian met him in the front room of the house.

"Tell Webb to get ready, Miss Hazlett."

"Yes, Sheriff. Won't you sit down?"

She pushed a chair forward. Hardin turned to seat himself.

Then Marian rammed a pistol barrel into his side.

He stiffened. Wrathfully he demanded: "What's this? A getaway for Webb? You're huntin' trouble, young woman!"

"I'm ready for it, Sheriff," she countered, taking his six-gun from his holster. "I figure that what I'm doing is right and necessary. I'm desperate about this, Hardin. If I've *got* to put a bullet into you, I'll do it! Understand? So don't talk, and move like I say, pronto. . . . Slip into these clothes, quick!"

He looked at her, saw the flash in her eye, the taut set of her lips; he obeyed

without a murmur. Taking off his cowhide vest, he buttoned the collar of his white shirt, knotted about his throat a gay tie she handed him. Next she reached him a coat and vest of neat brown store clothes. He slipped into them, buttoned them up; and last he put on a dapper felt hat.

"Now," she ordered tensely, her six-gun jabbing hard into his ribs, "you go into the next room. Nancy Bixel is in there. You walk up to her—Sheriff, you *must* do exactly as I tell you! It's a life and death matter!" He winced away from that gun of hers and nodded to indicate he didn't plan any shenanigans. "You walk up to Nancy, and slap her hard—real *hard*. Pretend to choke her, next. Understand? Now hurry!"

Hardin didn't argue, but stalked into the next room.

Nancy was there, arranging flowers in a bowl on a stand. She looked up as he strode in, but said nothing, made no sign.

Straight up to her he walked, hesitated, then slapped her on the cheek with a resounding smack. She screamed; but her cry was stifled as his big calloused hands closed about her throat.

Larry was sitting on the side porch; he heard that shriek, he saw Hardin throttling his sister. He was out of that chair and across the room in two jumps. Grabbing Hardin by the shoulder, he swung him around, shot fist to jaw—knocked the sheriff flat on his back to the floor.

This was injury piled on insult. This was more than a self-respecting sheriff could bear. Now Hardin was good and mad. With a roar he started to his feet—but Larry pounced onto him like a panther onto a deer. Locked in a wrestle, they rolled over and over, hammering and gouging at each other with fist and elbow. A couple of bull moose having a finish fight couldn't have done more damage in that room. Chairs were knocked flat, legs broken from under a table so that a pile of dishes smashed on the floor, the flower stand was overturned and the bowl let down with a splintering bang, a bookcase upset so that it toppled with a thundering crash, loosening a painting from the wall and a pair of antlers. Then Larry got Hardin pinned flat. He drove a right to the sheriff's plexus, a left to his throat, a terrific right to the pit of his stomach.

But Hardin was plenty tough. He got his knee up and shoved Larry off. Both men lunged to their feet, stood erect, traded punches; and then Larry began to feel the effects of his weeks in bed, and Hardin's thirty pounds' advantage in weight began to tell in his favor. Larry feinted, bore in, drove a haymaker to Hardin's jaw. Hardin merely shook his head, countered with a one-two punch to the chest that knocked Larry back. Hardin's left telescoped out in a straight thrust to the jaw that rocked Larry to his toes, and Hardin drove in a right cross under the ear that sent Larry staggering to one knee.

Marian chose this moment for the last step in her plan. Watching Nancy, who stared at the fight as if in a daze, Marian aimed her pistol at the floor and pressed trigger. The roar of a bullet was deafening in the room.

As if that gun shot had snapped a bond, let fall a curtain, Nancy responded. She screamed. Over her blank face came a look of intensest fear, of anguish, of heart-break.

"Larry!" she cried. "Ray—be careful! Larry! Oh, my God! Larry—he'll kill you! Ross! Ross!" she called, turning toward the door for a moment. "Larry, stop it—he'll kill you!"

Her voice seemed to choke up in her throat, and she slumped to the floor in a dead faint.

Not till then did Marian dart in between Hardin and Larry.

"Stop!" she cried. "Stop it, Sheriff! This was all a trick—and it worked! Nancy remembers — she remembers everything now. We'll bring her to, and she'll tell everything. She'll testify

for you, Larry; she'll save you. Now help me carry her to her room! Come on, Hardin!"

LATER, Nancy told Sheriff Hardin how her husband had been mistreating her, how Larry had come in, knocked Bixel down, how they had grappled and fought just as Larry and the sheriff had done—and how Bixel had been accidentally killed by the gun in his own hand. Hardin believed her. He said he wouldn't jail Larry now. And, he added, though Larry must stand trial, he would be acquitted on Nancy's testimony.

"As for you, Miss Hazlett," Hardin remarked sternly, "I ought to jail you for interferin' with an officer doin' his duty, for disturbin' the peace, an' incitin' a riot."

She promised good behavior; he laughed, and departed.

"Marian," Larry scolded earnestly, when he was alone with her later, "you took an awful chance. If I had lied to you, if Nancy had told a story that showed me up for a thief and a killer, you'd have been in trouble with the law. *Mean* trouble!"

She looked up at him, her eyes were shining.

"But Larry," she said softly, "I knew you hadn't lied to me. I trusted you, had enough faith in you to run any risk in order to help you. . . . You see, Larry, I love you."

"But—but, honey," he stammered. "you've known me such a short time, less than three weeks. Do you think you've known me long enough to be sure, *positive*, about how you feel toward me?"

"Yes, dear. Long enough. . . . Larry, to win a girl," she confided, moving close to him, "it's not how long you talk that counts, but what you say. And," she finished, on tiptoe, raising her lips to his, "actions speak louder than words, Larry."

She made herself clear; Larry could see through a ladder if placed in front of him on a sunny day. His arms tightened about her, he drew her close. . . . And his actions spoke far more than he could have said with words.

EDITOR ELVAN

By S. Omar Barker

Blackie Elvan puts out a surprise edition of his paper—and punctuates it with bird shot.

IF Blackie Elvan had been born a canine instead of a human, undoubtedly he would have been an Irish terrier. As it was, he grew up to his scant five feet six and 120 pounds to become a frontier editor, the wearer of a hoss-tail mustache, a slightly oversize nose to match, a brown paper cigarette hung lightly on his lower lip, and a twinkling keenness in his small, blackish eyes that never failed to make him friends—and enemies.

One of those friends came to be Gilly Brean, who didn't have many others besides his six-shooter. One of the enemies was Don Nicasio Silva ("Don Nick" for short), who, whether he had many friends or not, certainly had plenty of followers—especially under cover of night, and of certain blue bandanna masks. Don Nick and his *compañeros* toiled not, neither did they spin, but the little frontier community of Vega Chica yielded them prosperity just the same. Their enemies rarely thrived.

Certainly Gilly Brean didn't. A horse and saddle, boots, spurs, chaps, sombrero, a long-barreled forty-five, a fair supply of cartridges and a quick trigger-finger made up the bulk of his wealth. The old B 2 horse ranch that had been his father's had passed, by some hocus-pocus of threats and mortgage, into the hands of Don Nicasio Silva.

When Editor Elvan unloaded his type cases and hand press from a freight wagon and set up to publish the first newspaper in Vega County, he knew neither Gilly Brean nor Don Nick and his henchmen from Adam. But in the very first issue of "The VEGA CHICA CHIEFTAIN — Devoted to the Cause of Law, Order and the Promotion of Bean Farming in Vega County, New Mexico," Blackie Elvan proceeded to invite their acquaintance by jumping roughshod

upon both of them. In an editorial headed "UPROOT THE ROUGHNECKS!" he paid them his respects in part as follows:

On Monday night, on the way to a dance at the neighboring hamlet of Agua Zarca, a lawless young roosterino said to go by the name of Gilly Brean shot Attorney James W. Watson in the leg. On Tuesday night seven "Blue-faces," men masked by blue bandanna handkerchiefs, stepped into the Bridge Street Café and with drawn guns surrounded Mrs. "Mack" Martin, wife of the proprietor, compelled her to shell out the contents of her cash drawer, then to feed them, and then, for their ribald amusement, to crawl about on her hands and knees, picking up beans with her teeth. On Thursday night another troop of Blue-faces, on horseback, galloping without rhyme or reason up and down Bridge Street, shouting and shooting, ran down a harmless old Indian as he tried to cross the street. When he offered resistance they looped a lasso on his neck and strung him up to the bridge, to die an unreasonable death.

It is now Friday night as we go to press, and so far no arrests have been made. I am informed that none will be. One Nicasio Silva, I am told, will look after such matters. I am warned that it is dangerous to criticize him.

The *Chieftain* stands for law and order. We hereby announce our intention of criticizing whomever we damn please. If there are a dozen upright gentlemen in this settlement who will back us, we will run all these smart-aleck, nit-witty gun-twiddling Gilly Breans, and ultimately every lawless, mask-wearing gangeroo of the Silva brand out of Vega Chica. We hereby thumb our nose at any and all warnings and threats.

The *Chieftain*, its first number free, was distributed about Vega Chica early Saturday morning. By eight o'clock the town was a-buzz. By eight-thirty Editor Elvan began to get the reaction.

Six mounted men with blue bandannas over their faces rode down Bridge Street from the direction of the Plaza. The street suddenly became empty at their approach. They drew rein in front of the plank shack that housed Blackie Elvan and his paper, and walked inside.

Editor Elvan looked up from his type case to find himself surrounded by a half dozen Blue-faces. He saw in a flash that every man-jack of them wore a gun and a knife. One carried a rope. They said nothing. Blackie twirked his big mustache jauntily and started to roll a smoke.

"Come in to subscribe to the paper, gents?" If he was scared his voice didn't betray it. "Right this way!"

At his first step toward the crude plank desk in the corner one of the Blue-faces shot out a long arm, grabbed him by the shoulder and whirled him around. Silently they tightened the circle around him. One of them, about twice Blackie Elvan's size, pulled a folded piece of paper from his pocket, flicked it open and stuck it under the editor's nose.

Blackie took it. It was none too legibly written, but in a neatly flourished hand characteristic of the Mexican-American.

Mr. Gringo Editor:

It goin to cost you $25 the week for poblish these newspaper in Vega Chica. Also $100 for the remarks your make to the damage of character to Señor Nicasio Silva. Also you goin print on first page the apologize to Señor Silva tellin the peoples you was mistake because Señor Silva is most respect citizen an friend for the peoples. These moneys you goin to pay him to the man which bring these notice.

"Phooey!" said Blackie Elvan. "And if I don't?"

For answer the man with the rope began to make a loop.

Blackie stuck the paper in his pocket, flicked away his dead cigarette and rolled another. He drew a long puff.

"Gents," he remarked, sharply, "get this straight: I'm runnin' this paper without no free advice. Now git to hell outa here an' stay out!"

With a sudden swift motion, so unexpected that it was successful, he reached up and yanked the mask from one man's face.

"Take 'em off, you lousy cowards!" he snapped. "We'll see who the hell—"

The smart wallop of a gun butt on the side of his head suddenly silenced him. It floored him, too. Before he could make a move to rise the man with the rope stooped over him, his loop made.

Pow! Pow!

The roar of shots seemed all at once to shake the plank shanty. Nobody was hit, but the six masked hombres forgot Blackie Elvan. They turned as one man to face the doorway, and in the doorway a tall, tow-headed youngster with a grin on his face and a faintly smoking six-gun in his hand.

"Six masked men on a desk man's chest, huh? Yo-ho an' a pot-hole of bums! Yuh're totin' guns, hombres, why don't yuh reach fer 'em! Skeered of one lone gringo? Yeah? Now snap 'em up, high! *Pronto!*"

Six masked Blue-faces obeyed, with no more than a grunt of protest. Their half-masked eyes gleamed hatred, but along with it a wholesome light of fear. They knew this *gringo muchacho* in the doorway. One of these nights they'd string him up. But now—well, it just wasn't on the Silva-ista program to buck the drop.

"*Pendejo!*" growled one of them. "For these *tonteria* you die!"

But when the young towhead put a bullet hole through his sombrero the Silva-ista shut up.

Blackie Elvan was on his feet, now, busy snapping guns out of their holsters, sticking them inside his belt, his shirt or wherever he could. By the time he had all six of them he looked like a walking dreadnaught.

"Eeny-meeny-miney-mo, gents!" he proclaimed. "Which one of you turkey-buzzards answers to the name of Don Nick Silva? None of you? Then when you see him take him this message: Tell him Blackie Elvan ain't kickin' in no tribute to nobody for the privilege of runnin' this paper, see? And watch the next *Chieftain!* It'll carry Don Nick's little blackmail letter to me in full—on the front page, savvy? Now then clear out before I—"

Like a banty rooster Blackie Elvan hopped up to the nearest hombre and landed a boot toe neatly in the seat of his pants.

The masked hombre did not move. He was taking his orders, right now, from the young gringo in the doorway.

The gringo grinned broardly.

"My regards to Don Nick!" he drawled. "Now vamoose!"

Like crowding sheep they went, gunless and cowed, but with a sinister muttering of threats for the future.

Shakily, now that the immediate danger was over, Blackie Elvan sat down and rolled a smoke.

"You sure pulled the rope off my neck that time, son!" he said. "By gollies, if we jest had about a dozen more like you here in Vega Chica we'd clean up this Silva gang pronto!"

"An' maybe this here no-account young Brean you was yelpin' about, too?"

"Yep! Him also. We wouldn't play no fav'rites. I wouldn't be surprised if he wouldn't come coyotin' around here too, pretty soon, takin' a shot at me through the keyhole. Let 'im come! I reckon he wouldn't stay long now!"

Blackie laid out an array of six Silva-ista six-guns on the desk. His young rescuer's eyes blinked quizzically.

"Yuh mean yuh'd—yuh'd take a shot at him yerself?" he asked.

Blackie swept a six-gun up into one hand and pointed it waveringly toward the door.

"Long!" he said. "Just like that, see! I'd let the daylight through him so quick he'd never—"

The little editor's threat broke off in midair. Something as unannounced as lightning struck his arm and sent the six-gun spinning to land with a plunk on the floor. Editor Elvan found himself looking, at about a fifteen inch range, into the round black hole of a forty-five barrel. Above it scowled the ruddy face of his rescuer. Blackie was too startled to see the repressed twinkle in the young man's blue eyes.

"Pong!" said the youngster. "An' what else, Mister Editor? I'm Gilly Brean, see! Now suppose yuh eat crow awhile. I ain't exactly no angel, but I'm kinder techy in spots. Any hombre that rates me along with them Blue-face polecats, either personal or in his paper, has natcherly got to eat his words! Yuh savvy?"

Blackie Elvan's jaw dropped till his big mustache looked as if it were a bush hanging over a precipice. The dying cigarette on his lower lip slipped off to the floor. His jaw worked soundlessly. But only for a second. He eased back in his chair, fished out a tobacco sack and rolled a smoke. Gilly Brean noticed that his long bony fingers seemed perfectly steady. Not until he had taken a couple of puffs did Blackie Elvan speak.

"Brean," he said, "you pulled my neck out of a loop a few minutes ago, and I'm mighty grateful to you for same. But the editorial policy of the *Chieftain* is not a personal matter, and until there is sufficient evidence to the contrary, the *Chieftain's* editorial comment stands. I eat beans, chili, onions, okra, garlic, limburger and many other articles too odorous to mention but not—" he paused for emphasis—"my words!"

Gilly Brean advanced the barrel of his forty-five till it pressed lightly against the end of Editor Elvan's nose.

"An' suppos'n' I pull the trigger?" he drawled.

"You'll ruin a mighty handsome nose, Brean," Blackie answered. "That's all."

For half a minute the two men eyed each other, unwavering, unblinking. Then all at once Gilly Brean's scowl broke into a grin. At the same second that he jumped his gun back into its holster with one hand, he reached out the other one and tweaked Blackie Elvan's big nose. Then, with a chuckle he stuck out his hand.

"Speakin' as one darn fool to another, Elvan," he said, "yuh've got a heap more guts than brains! Shake, pardner!"

With a slow grin Blackie Elvan stood up and took the proffered hand.

"I don't mind your looks, Brean," he said, "but so far—" his eyes twinkled keenly—"I ain't taken nothing back!"

"Yuh've took a trouble hand in a dirty an' dangerous game, Mister Editor," said Gilly Brean soberly, "when yuh set out to buck ol' Nick Silva an' his Blue-faced roosters. I know frum experience. They come purty near runnin' things hereabouts, includin' Sheriff DeLoy. But if yuh're determined to buck 'em, take this here tip frum me: keep yerself in the open daytimes, an' at night go crawl in a badger hole an' pull the hole in after yuh. With anybody that fights back ol' Nick works under cover. Me, I'm marked fer a shot in the back the first time I ain't lookin', an' now you'll be, too. Maybe yuh could git next to somebody an' persuade Uncle Sam to send troops in here. Me, I couldn't—I've done too much gun shootin' around these parts myself!"

"It's this here superfluous an' lawless gun-shootin' that the *Chieftain* aims to buck, young feller! You can't fight floods with water."

Gilly Brean shrugged.

"Nor polecats with highfalutin' editorials," he grunted. "Well, I'm driftin'—by the back way. Don't poke yer head into no more ropes—an' lay off of Gilly Brean, pardner!"

Blackie Elvan said no more. But half an hour later, when Sheriff DeLoy stepped into his place with a warrant for the arrest of Gilly Brean, Blackie lied like a man.

"He ain't been in here," he said, "since I kicked him out last night. He was headin', when he left, fer parts unknown— leavin' the country."

Then he chuckled to himself at the look of relief that appeared on Sheriff DeLoy's face. Evidently Gilly Brean was one young roosterino that the Sheriff of Vega County didn't hanker any too strongly to meet up with in open daylight, even if Don Nick had passed the word down to arrest him instead of relying on some lucky chance to pot him in the back. Once under arrest—in the charge of their own handpicked sheriff—it would be doubtful whether Gilly Brean would ever reach a courtroom for trial.

BILLY BREAN said a mouthful when he told Editor Elvan that he'd taken a trouble hand in a dangerous game. The wonder is that Don Nick's henchmen didn't "get him" right off the jump. But Blackie made a prompt move to forestall that. No sooner had Sheriff DeLoy moved on than Blackie got busy. He whistled a Mexican boy in from the street and gave him half a dollar. Then he sent him to Don Nicasio Silva with the six pistols he had taken from his hombres, and a brief message:

To Whom It May Concern:

One stickful of type dropped in the right place in my office will set off enough dynamite to blow a hundred men to hell, and me with 'em. Which I would rather do than stretch rope on the bridge. Whoever comes to the *Chieftain* looking for trouble does so at his own risk.

Editor of the *Chieftain*.

P. S. Watch for next week's paper. Your name might be in it! You never can tell.

It was a one hundred percent bluff. All the *Chieftain's* dynamite was pure-verbal and editorial. But it worked. Blackie had no more blue-masked visitors calling at his office.

But that night his shack got a shower of bullets from horsemen galloping past. They broke his windows, and one damaged his press, but the little editor, busy in the back room composing a careful letter to the Federal Judge over at Santa Fé, was unhit.

When Editor Elvan ventured out on Bridge Street Monday morning he walked with the cocky swagger of an Irish terrier on a hunt for alley cats. He had business to attend to from one end of the street to the other, and he attended to it unmolested. But Blackie knew better than to presume that he had the Silva outfit licked. Undoubtedly they were simply lying low for a good chance to pot him.

Blackie left his office that morning unarmed. He returned with a six-gun that looked half as big as he was sagging in a holster at his thinnish shank.

"I may have to hire two men and a boy to help me point it," he had remarked to the second-hand man from whom he bought it, "but a feller's got to be in style!"

The news that the scrawny little editor of the new newspaper had defied Don Nick and his gang and was apparently getting away with it spread quickly over Vega Chica, with the result that Blackie had several callers during the day. Most of them sneaked in by the back way, and all of them made a showing of friendliness, though their friendly advice varied. Doc Hoyt, the postmaster, and three or four others congratulated him and promised to stand by him if things should come to a showdown. With their visits was born the nucleus of a Vigilantes Committee.

Lawyer Watson, limping from Gilly Brean's bullet in his leg, stayed the longest and talked the most.

"I am your friend, Mr. Elvan," he said, "and the friend of your paper.

That is why I have come here to counsel you against a too vigorous editorial campaign against Señor Silva. And to—er—offer my services as—er—mediator between—that is to say, if you are to continue your valuable paper, it would be wise to reach some friendly agreement with Señor Silva. Otherwise, perhaps, the consequences might be—er—rather severe. Señor Silva has power, but he is not—er—wholly without reason. Now if I might suggest a reasonable agreement whereby—"

That was as far as he got.

"Horse-radish!" Elvan restrained a snort. "And the next time you kiss Don Nick's big toe tell him for me that if he's got any message for the *Chieftain* to bring it hisself! I'll talk to him—with this!" He hauled out the forty-five from its holster, cocked it awkwardly and pointed it carelessly in Lawyer Watson's direction. For a lame man Lawyer Watson made mighty good time to the door.

"You're a damned fool!" he snapped, and slammed the door behind him.

Another day passed and nothing happened. But the lull in deviltry did not fool Blackie Elvan. He circulated up and down Bridge Street with his eyes and ears wide open.

The total absence of trouble began to make him nervous. Another thing bothered him, too: what had become of Gilly Brean? Since he had slipped out the back way from the *Chieftain* office, Blackie had neither seen nor heard hide, hair nor hullo of him. He picked up from various sources just what the Silva plan had been: to have Sheriff DeLoy arrest the youngster and then somehow fail to reach jail with him alive. He wondered whether Gilly savvied what he was up against, and had left the country. Or had they nabbed him and done him out some place on the quiet?

Editor Elvan didn't have long to be bothered about the fate of Gilly Brean. Early Wednesday afternoon his own troubles began again. As he stepped out of the post office, opening a long envelope, the corner return of which read "U. S. Federal Court, Santa Fé, N. M.," a burly, ripe-olive skinned hombre suddenly blocked his path. From descriptions he had heard, Blackie guessed in a jiffy who it was. The man's clothing, his pearl-handled, gold-mounted gun was a shade richer than anybody besides Don Nicasio Silva would be wearing.

"Hello, Nick!" said Elvan. "What's eatin' on your gizzard?"

"I been lookin' for you, gringo," growled Don Nick. "I'm want—"

"Oh, you want to subscribe to the *Chieftain?*"

Elvan's tone was defiant, mocking. The two men stood toe to toe, neither yielding passage. All at once one of Silva's guns snapped out and prodded Elvan's ribs before the little editor, gun-green as he was, could reach for his own.

"I'm want that you leave Vega Chica to-night—or *por Dios*—"

Elvan's laugh broke him off.

"Leave hell!" he said. "Why, I just come, feller! I'm publishing a paper here! Hadn't you heard about it?"

The burly Mexican's answer was a swift swing of his free hand. Elvan might have dodged it, but apparently he did not try. The flat-handed blow caught him alongside the ear and knocked him winding.

"You gringo peeg!" began Don Nick, "I'm goin' teach you—"

Elvan rolled over with a groan, but as he turned he fired. The shot went wild, but it paralyzed Don Nick for a second with astonishment. He had not expected resistance. Don Nick cocked his own gun, but he did not fire. From the corner of his eye he could see Doc Hoyt, the postmaster, coming out through the door. The scene was too public for the taste of Don Nick Silva. He leaped back toward a horse standing rein-anchored at the street edge. As he did so he whistled a short, sharp whistle.

Blackie Elvan, scrambling to his feet, heard a swift swish. Before he could

fire again or move to dodge it, the loop of a rope settled over his shoulders and yanked tight. The next thing he knew he was being dragged up Bridge Street like a calf to a branding fire. The street had suddenly filled with blue-masked men. The man behind whose horse he bumped along wore a blue mask, too. The Silva gang had him where they wanted him. Somehow he managed to hang onto his gun and to the letters he had not had time to pocket.

For a hundred yards they dragged him, at a bumpy, torturing trot. All at once they stopped, yelled excitedly back and forth in Spanish for a moment; then Blackie felt the rope slacken. The Blue-face dropped it. With a hurricane of whoops and yells the whole cavalcade turned into a side alley and disappeared in a cloud of galloping dust. Don Nick himself rode close by Blackie. "To-night!" he snarled as he passed.

Blackie Elvan's brief campaign against Don Nick had already begun to bear fruit. What had stopped his torturers was a group of half a dozen men with shotguns and rifles, advancing down the street. The nucleus of the Vigilantes Committee Blackie Elvan had begun organizing had saved his life without firing a shot. Even in his misery, the wind gone plumb out of him, Blackie Elvan felt like shouting aloud. Before his arrival in Vega Chica nobody—unless it was Gilly Brean—had dared raise a hand against Don Nick. And now, at the first show of resistance, the Mexes had pulled for cover.

When his friends picked him up out of the dust, bruised and sore, but with no bones broken, Blackie Elvan was already formulating this week's headlines for the *Chieftain:* "SILVA BLUE-FACES SHOW YELLOW—Run Like Whipped Dogs—" and so on.

Battered as he was, Blackie Elvan got busy. He was playing a hunch. He had a big, rush job on his hands. In the early darkness that evening, Doc Hoyt and another friend came in to help him. They worked swiftly—quietly, like shadows.

AT ten that night a light was still burning in the shack office of the *Chieftain.*

Gilly Brean, riding up over the *Creston* west of Vega Chica, saw it and decided to drop in on Editor Elvan for a brief chat. Brean had not been absent these days from Vega Chica wholly for the purpose of hiding out from the Blue-faces. He had been riding the wilderness range back in the mountains trying to pick up a few head of the B 2 horses that had scattered to become wildies since the Silva possession of the Brean ranch. If he had found enough to make it worth his while, he had intended to sell them over on the Santa Fé side. If he could raise a little money for expenses he meant to bring suit for recovery of the Brean lands. If he could once get legal possession again he counted on his six-gun to keep it. But he had had poor luck gathering horses—so poor in fact that he had finally given it up. Now he was riding back into Vega Chica to lay for a chance to settle his grievances with Don Nick in person.

The light in Editor Elvan's shack rather surprised him. He had supposed that Elvan would have been run out before now. His conscience pricked him a little for not staying to help the roosterish little editor in his battle. The man was a damned fool, of course, but—

From Vega Chica there came suddenly a great, flaring burst of flame, and, following it, a rumbling, thunderish roar that fairly shook the earth. When the blackness of night settled again, the little light where the *Chieftain* shack had been was gone. In its place red flames began to rise.

"Dynamited him out, by God!" Gilly Brean sucked in his breath. "The damned skunks!"

He put spurs to his pony and came at a gallop into Vega Chica and down

Bridge Street. The street was practically deserted. Editor Elvan's shack was nothing but a ruddy heap of smoldering coals settling down into a great hole blown out by dynamite. Except for some swearing men whose shacks stood neighbors to Elvan's, busy with water buckets to prevent the fire spreading, there was no one about.

Gilly Brean rode the streets, alleys and roadways of Vega Chica for an hour, like a trailing wolf, in search of some skulking member of the Silva gang, but he found none. He rode to Silva's house up back of the Plaza, but it did him no good. The dwelling stood inside a high adobe wall, like a huge stockade. The massive gates were barred. Everything was dark and silent inside except for the munching sounds of feeding horses.

Gilly rode back downtown. He went to the Bridge Street Café for a cup of coffee. Mack Martin unlocked the door for him cautiously. The man was plainly frightened.

"Pore ol' Elvan!" he said. "One issue of his paper and blooey! They blow him plumb to hell!"

Gilly Brean said nothing, but his thoughts were grim ones.

It was Wednesday night that the *Chieftain* office was blown up. Thursday's daylight showed nothing but a "shell hole" and in it smoldering ashes, some melted metal and a little pile of whitish stuff, like heat-crumbled bones. Gilly Brean looked it over, then withdrew to the back of Mack Martin's café to lay low in the hope that Don Nick himself might show up downtown.

He didn't. Plenty of hombres generally supposed to be his gangsters were on the streets. Looking out from the café, Gilly could see an occasional group of them stop to point at the ruin across the street and laugh. Gilly had to hold himself in to keep from stepping out there among 'em, especially when Don Nick's legal tool, Sheriff DeLoy, appeared. But he stayed out of sight. He had done with monkeying with the "hired men"—he wanted his showdown with the big boss himself.

By Friday evening Gilly Brean could stay out of sight no longer. He came out and took a stroll up and down Bridge Street. Then he came back into the café and sat down to supper.

Presently a Mexican boy slipped in cautiously and approached him.

"Señor Brean," he said, "the sheriff she say that you step outside one meenute—she want for speak you! She say you no come, she obliged for come in get you!"

"You tell him, *chico*, to come ahead. I'm waitin'—with a hot welcome!"

The kid went back out. A few minutes later three Blue-faces came stumbling in through the door, pushing each other, and in turn pushed by somebody behind them. Without warning they opened fire. Their bullets crashed the china on the table.

Gilly Brean answered swiftly yet deliberately. The foremost Mexican tumbled headlong into the room. The next one let out a yell and stumbled back outside. The third attacker withdrew, but only for a moment. When he appeared again, others swarmed with him. Glass crashed from a small side window and bullets splintered the café counter. Gilly Brean felt one sting his cheek like a lash. Mack Martin helped him answer the fire, now, from behind the counter, but at the next volley Mack took one in the forehead and went down.

Gilly knew now that, if they kept on coming, the jig was up. He could kill a good many, but if they were determined to get him and had guts enough to keep coming, they would succeed in doing it. He smashed out the lights with a couple of shots and in the semi-darkness leaped back behind the big cook stove. He reloaded and prepared to stand siege. He caught a glimpse of the burly figure of Don Nick himself skulking well back in the crowd. He fired quickly at him through the glass of the café front, but somebody else received the glancing shot after it shat-

tered the window, and Don Nick dodged out of sight.

IN a back room at Doc Hoyt's adobe post office building, its noise muffled by the thick mud walls and by blankets hung on the two small windows, a small hand printing press had been clanking and growling most of the afternoon. A sweating little man with a hoss-tail mustache, a burnt-out brown paper cigarette hanging on his lower lip, had kept it going. Now, along toward dusk, he laid the last folded newspaper, black with headlines, on top of a big pile. He chuckled. Vega Chica was due for a surprise. The *Chieftain*, supposedly blown all to hell, along with its editor, was coming out ahead of time. And full of hot stuff—all about the Silva gang of Blue-faces and what would become of them as soon as—

Blackie Elvan gathered a big pile of his surprise edition under his arm, strapped on his six-gun and started out through the post office part of the building.

Doc Hoyt opened the door for him with a grin. Also he stuck a handful of queer looking cartridges into the little editor's pocket.

"Here's some more, Blackie," he said. "I loaded 'em up this afternoon. Yore gun's full of 'em, too. Don't be afeerd to use 'em if yuh have to. As good as a shotgun—yuh cain't miss. But be careful—even if yuh are a ghost! I'll round up some of the boys—jest in case!"

Blackie Elvan staggered up the street under the weight of his papers and of the big six-gun at his shank. At the first store he shoved one under the door. He chuckled as he went. Wait till Don Nick should see this issue—wouldn't he bust plumb in two!

Suddenly the sound of shooting farther up the street came to his ears. Blackie stopped to listen. The next second the Mexican kid with whom he had made friends met him on the run.

"Los Azules!" he panted. "The Blue-faces! They make the fight on Señor Brean in the café! She keel one—two—maybe t'ree—but they don't queet! They goin' to keel him. She in corner one lamb from coyotes!"

"Gilly Brean?"

But the scared youngster was already gone.

The rattle of shots, the tinkling of broken glass, sounded again. Blackie Elvan dropped his papers and started on a run up the street, his hand on his six-gun. But within half a dozen steps he stopped, turned back and hurried to the sprawling pile of *Chieftains*. There was a wind blowing. If he left them here they'd be lost—after all his scheming and planning to make sure of this issue—with its full exposure of the Silva outfit—its scathing editorials—and its hint at a new and unexpected development in law and order at Vega Chica. No, he must not lose these papers.

Swiftly he picked them up in bunches five or six inches thick and stuffed them carefully inside his shirt, shoving them on around until his body seemed to bulge like a barrel. The little pile remaining he laid up against a wall with a rock on top of them. Then, looking as burly as a hog, and traveling like a waddling duck, he hurried panting on up the street.

Even in the dusk he could see that the milling, yelling, shooting crowd that stormed the Bridge Street Café were mostly men with bandanna masks on. It would be sheer madness to rush into their midst like this. He paused, cudgeling his brain for a plan of procedure.

All at once the shooting stopped. The crowd on the sidewalk surged into the café. He heard shouts of *"Cuélgalo! Cuélgalo!* (Hang him! Hang him!)" Blackie guessed what that meant. The gang had been too much for Gilly Brean. Somehow they had taken him alive—to hang from the bridge.

Somewhere off in the direction of the Santa Fé road a new sound, high

and sharply musical, pierced the evening air. It was too faint for the noisy rabble up the street to hear. Blackie Elvan heard—and understood it. But it did not stop him. He came on up toward the café front more stealthily now.

Light flared up again in the café. The yellowish glow showed him the shadowy silhouette of a masked man skulking in the shadows between him and the café front. A guard left outside, no doubt. But the guard was intent on the goings-on inside. Blackie pussyfooted up within three feet of him. Then, with a froggish jump, he sprang upon him. His heavy six-gun thumped heavily across the side of the hombre's head. He sank down with a hoglike grunt. Blackie kicked him smartly in the stomach. The grunty noise ceased.

With swift fingers Blackie untied the blue bandanna from the man's face. He saw with a start that it was Lawyer Watson, so he kicked him again for good measure. But he lost no time. Even as he kicked he tied the blue bandanna up over his own face. He seized Watson's hat, jammed it on his own head.

The next instant he was elbowing his way unnoticed through the surging mob of masked men inside the café.

They were bringing Gilly Brean out, kicking and cuffing him as they came. Half a dozen men had hold of him. They had a rope around his neck. His face was bloody, one eye swollen shut, but still he fought them.

Blackie shoved his way up into the midst of them. In the surging mêlée he made it easier than he had hoped. He found himself, finally, square in front of Gilly Brean.

"Déjame darle uno! (Let me crack him one!)" he snarled, raising his six-gun as if to strike Brean in the face. But instead of striking Brean, the gun swung around as it descended. So did Blackie Elvan. With his left hand he reached up and yanked the mask down from his face. At the same instant he pulled the trigger. The gun roared. From its muzzle came a scattering charge of bird shot, Doc Hoyt's special load for a poor marksman! Half a dozen men felt themselves hit.

"Scatter, you polecats!" yelled Blackie. "Before I blow yuh all to hell! I'm the devil's uncle, right outa Hades!"

He fired again. Then, as a number of Blue-faces recognized him—the gringo editor come to life again—the stampede began. Here was a man they had killed, shooting a gun that made a dozen hits at once! Half a dozen hombres scrambled for the door, yelling aloud to the saints to save them.

But not all of them were so easily frightened. Several snapped out their own six-shooters and fired point-blank at the editor's body—heart shots, they should have been. But they were not. The bullets thudded dully into the packed newspapers invisible under Elvan's shirt, but the little editor did not even so much as flinch.

"Ay! El mismo diablo! (The devil himself!)" yelled one of the shooters, turning to flee. *"Ni balazos lo lastiman!* (Not even bullets hurt him!)"

Suddenly Blackie saw a burly masker draw and take careful aim at the staggering, dazed figure of Gilly Brean. Blackie knew who it was in a flash. It was Don Nick himself, determined, devil or no devil, ghost or no ghost, to finish off his man.

As the gun roared, Blackie Elvan managed somehow to leap in front of Gilly Brean. The bullet spudded into the paper wadding about his body and came on through hard enough to thud heavily against his stomach. It sickened him, but he did not flinch. The next instant he let Don Nick have a full charge of bird shot in the face. With a scream of pain, Don Nick turned and fled.

Blackie somehow got Gilly Brean to a chair, found some water and swished it into his face. The youngster revived enough to grin and ask for a gun.

There was a brief sound of skirmish-

ing outside. Evidently Blackie's scant half dozen Vigilantes had got on the job. But the Blue-faces numbered scores. The next thing he knew somebody had rounded them up again and harangued the panic out of them. Blackie saw that they were about to rush the café again.

Then, suddenly, it was all over. Rhythmic hoofbeats sounded down Bridge Street. A bugle call rang out. A column of cavalry, sent by the Federal authorities at Santa Fé, on the appeal of Editor Elvan, had arrived, and with them, law and order in Vega Chica.

Editor Elvan took Gilly Brean down to his new quarters in Doc Hoyt's adobe to dress his wounds. Gilly looked at the print shop in puzzlement.

"But I thought—"

"Yep, you thought we were all blowed up—so did everybody else—except Doc and the other feller that helped me move in here on the sneak when I got a hunch Don Nick was goin' to dynamite me. To make it look right I left some scrap iron, some type metal and—for my bones— an old deceased canine! By the way, have you read my retraction and apology to Mr. Gilly Brean in this issue? It's on the back page—in small type, near the bottom!"

Blackie chuckled and rolled himself a brown smoke, while Gilly read it:

"Now about Gilly Brean," it said. "We either ought to hang him—or elect him sheriff!"

Editor Elvan had plenty of enthusiastic readers for his "surprise" edition of the *Chieftain* that night after all. Gilly Brean, whose appointment as acting sheriff, by the Federal Court —in place of DeLoy, suspended—also on the plea of Editor Elvan—came through with the troops, helped him distribute them. One prospective subscriber, however, whom Blackie had hoped especially to surprise, did not read the *Chieftain* that night—nor any other. Don Nicasio Silva, his face peppered with bird shot, but otherwise unhurt, had rashly resisted a cavalry sergeant, and ended his career as a lawless captain of terror with a sword through his ribs.

Editor Elvan slept well that night.

If Things Ain't Right, There's Nobody Like a Glass-eyed Ex-bartender for Fixing 'Em—Especially if His Name Is Andy Snoott!

Learn How He Does It, In...

TROUBLED WATERS

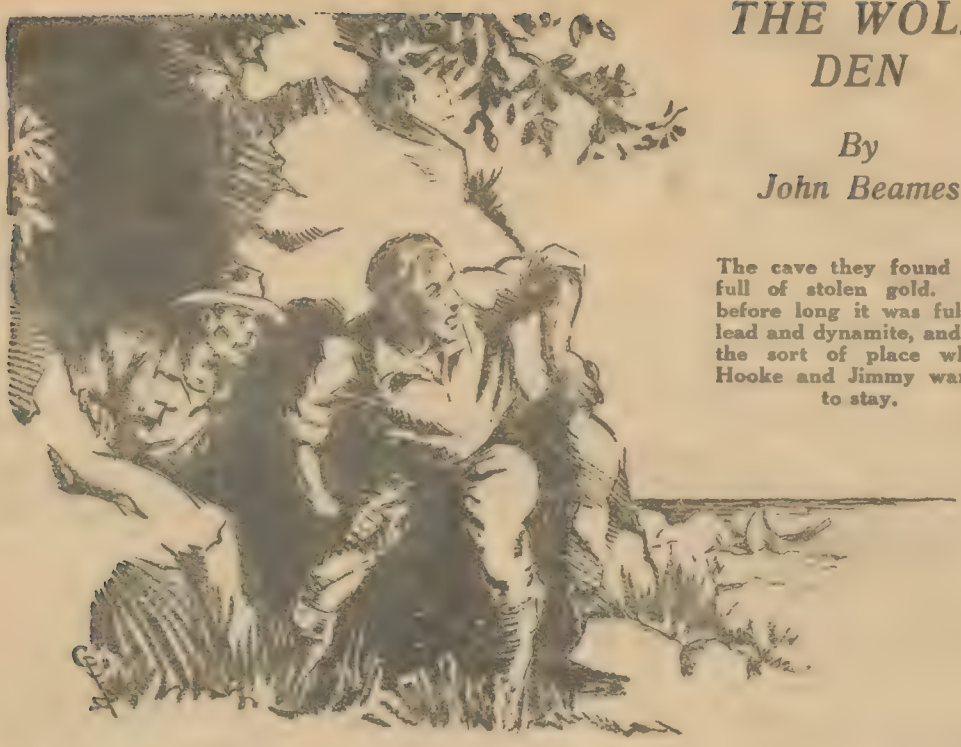
By Palmer Hoyt

In the First March Issue — On the Newsstands, February 6th.

Ask for ACE-HIGH MAGAZINE by Name.

THE WOLF DEN

By John Beames



The cave they found was full of stolen gold. But before long it was full of lead and dynamite, and not the sort of place where Hooke and Jimmy wanted to stay.

THE cave mouth was low and narrow and overhung by a huge mass of rock.

"Some wolf den," said Jimmy. "Wonder what's in there."

They struck a match inside and stared about them.

"Somebody's hangout," said Hooke. "See all the stuff."

"But look here, Hooky, this pile of ore. Wait'll I get another match. My gosh, what sort of a dump is this? Where'd all this stuff come from? Cinch it wasn't mined here."

They picked up some pieces of ore and took them to the cave mouth. "If this didn't come from the Dorinda, I'm a Chinaman with whiskers," exclaimed Hooke.

"An' this looks like Dobie-Dykes stuff," said Jimmy. "That or Crescent Queen."

They stared at one another, the lank Hooke pulling at his long chin, and chubby Jimmy shuffling his feet. They both nodded as the same thought struck them.

"You said it," said Hooke. "High-graders. This here ore was swiped, and this is their cache. Pretty smart hide-out too. Nobody never thought of looking in these islands."

"What's comin' to us out of it?" asked Jimmy.

"Liable to be a kick in the slats. This outfit of high-graders is quick an' devilish with anybody hornin' in on 'em. That's what they tell me. Remember them two fellers that was shot a while back?"

"Uh-huh, they say they're real bad acters, but there's nobody home today an' I want to look around. We might do good out of this yet—the Dorinda an' them ought to cough up useful for bein' wised to this."

"I believe you," nodded Hooke. "But you want to keep lookin' three ways—that outfit won't take no cheap excuses if they catch us here."

They followed a path from the cave mouth to where it ended in a sheltered cove, the mouth of which was masked with big alders. They climbed the side of the ravine to a rocky pinnacle, but the lake lay smooth and blue among the islands and the gulls wheeled and dipped undisturbed. Reassured, they

returned to explore the cave thoroughly with a light.

It was rather narrow but very deep. The front part was given over to cases and bags of food, bedding, cooking utensils, tools, weapons, ammunition, and miscellaneous goods that had probably been stolen. The whole further end almost to the roof was heaped with broken ore.

"How much do you think is here, Hooky?" asked Jimmy in awed tones.

"You ask more questions than a three-year-old. How would I know? But the best ore in the Dorinda runs as high as a thousand dollars to the ton, an' they tell me the Crescent Queen does better than that in Number Two shaft. You can bet these birds pick their ore. There's a lot of money in this pile."

"Let's get out of here, Hooky; I seen enough," said Jimmy urgently, and walked to the door.

Hooke lingered for a closer examination.

"Come on quick," cried Jimmy suddenly. "I hear a launch comin'. Oh, my God—we're too late!"

Peering from the cave mouth they saw a big launch poke her nose into the cove and stop by the rough jetty. Men jumped ashore, hoisted sacks upon their shoulders and came heavily up the ravine.

"In back of the ore," directed Hooke. "They'll likely dump what they got and go away again."

They scrambled hastily over the pile and wedged themselves into the narrow cleft beyond. The door was blocked by a panting figure.

"Horry up here mit a light," grunted a voice.

A match flared and a lantern was lit. A file of men bending under heavy sacks of ore climbed the pile and dumped their loads. They seemed to be of different nationalities, for they spoke to each other in broken English. A man addressed as Steve seemed to be the leader for he issued commands in a loud voice.

They sat down in a group by the door, nine of them, and began to eat, talking and laughing in high good humor. Through the mangled English the pair in the shadows caught references to jobs pulled off at this mine or that, boastful stories of mine managers, mine detectives and police easily outwitted, plans for future raids and for running the ore down the lake to confederates for disposal.

A man rushed in shouting, "Spy, spy!"

"What de matter, Beppo?"

"I see da track. Come, I show. Two men." He waved two fingers in the air. "Fresh da track."

"They'll find the canoe," groaned Jimmy under his breath.

"If we'd only thought to bring our guns," mourned Hooke.

"Search de cave," ordered Steve. "Hey, in dere," he bellowed toward the darkness, "you come out or ve keel you. I see you dere."

"Give me a hand up," whispered Jimmy, who was behind Hooke. "There's a open place up here."

As the high-graders came toward the ore pile with a lantern, Hooke gave his partner a leg up into a chamber above and behind them. Jimmy extended his hand, and with a quick tug Hooke was beside him.

Light darted up from below, and they heard the men coming. The second cavern was a narrow passage, down which the pair groped their way. Hooke, turning his head, saw the lantern come up through the hole followed by a head. He picked a stone from the wall and flung it. Head and lantern disappeared with a howl.

"Now you done it," declared Jimmy gloomily.

"Push along," said Hooke. "I don't know where we're goin', but we ain't stoppin' till we get there."

The cave filled with thunder.

"They're shootin'," cried Jimmy.

"You say—I ain't been hit yet. Their bullets ain't educated to goin' around corners."

They scrambled on in utter darkness, confused and hostile noises behind. Sometimes they groped along by the wall, a void on the other hand; sometimes they squeezed through places where the plump Jimmy was in danger of sticking. They climbed masses of broken and jagged stone, barking their shins, or plunged down steep slopes.

Jimmy stopped dead. "Quit shovin' —you'll have me over. I got to light a match."

The thin flame showed them six feet below an inky pool. There was no way around, but on the far side a low arch led onward.

"We're sunk," groaned Jimmy.

"Not yet. Will be though if we're caught. Take a chance, old sport, I'd as lief be drowned as shot."

The match went out. Some one shouted behind them and the echoes magnified the noise a hundredfold. They lowered themselves cautiously and felt the icy water creep up their legs. Hooke lit another match.

"See the hole? All right, strike straight for it."

A step and the water was at their chins, a second and they were out of their depth. The lantern shone out aboye. Shouts, "Dere dey are!" Shots, bullets splashing around them. They reached the hole together and squeezed in. There were not two feet of space between the water and the roof, and their very bones were aching with the chill.

Feeling for knobs of rock with their feet, they clawed their way along. Once the roof came down so low the water reached their lips. Between cold, fatigue and despair, Jimmy was about to sink.

"Daylight," cried Hooke. "Hurrah, we're safe!"

They emerged from a narrow crack on the shore, having crossed the island through the ancient volcanic cleft.

Jimmy filled his lungs and shuddered. "I wouldn't do that again for a million dollars, Hooky."

"Once is enough for me too. Hustle to the canoe; I ain't anxious to stick around."

They hastened to where they had left the craft.

"Don't catch me wanderin' around again without a gun," said Hooke, lovingly handling his rifle. "This here country ain't peaceful no more."

They pushed off and paddled vigorously for the distant mainland.

"I hear that damned launch," said Jimmy, before they had gone far.

"I see her," answered Hooke, and pointed. "We can't beat her. Back we go."

The launch pursued, foam curling at her bows and rifle fire crackling from her gunwale. The prospectors drove ashore and dived into the bush. But the cover was thin and commanded from all sides. They ran up the slope and flung themselves among some great granite blocks and stunted spruce.

"This gang best stop an' think," declared Hooke. "I'm liable to be ugly if I'm crowded. You watch on that side."

A rifle cracked. Jimmy dropped his weapon with a clatter and put his hand to his mouth, and then showed it to his partner. A red graze showed all across the back of it.

"Look at what the swine done," he said.

"They'll do worse than that if you don't keep down."

"I'll learn 'em," swore Jimmy, tears of rage and pain in his eyes. He wrapped his hand in a dirty neckerchief and took up his rifle. "They got me mad now. Somebody's goin' to have a funeral."

"Make it the other feller's," advised Hooke. "Don't get reckless."

Jimmy grunted to himself, shifting his position from one rock to another. Hooke saw him settle down and stiffen. He fired and turned with a savage grin. "I know what I done to that guy."

The high-graders opened fire on them from an alder flat on their flank and from a rocky knoll in front that commanded their position and kept them pinned to the ground. Behind them

was only naked rock running down to the lake where the launch stood guard.

"This can go on for a week," said Hooke. "They dassn't come out an' we're scared to."

"The hell you say," snarled Jimmy. "Do you know I'm hungry?"

"I could do with some chuck too, but the cook's on strike, I guess."

"Suppose you shoot a few of them garlic-eaters an' not make so many funny cracks."

"Don't see nothin' to shoot at, an' I hate wastin' ammunition."

"To listen to you a feller'd think this was a picinc."

"I never get excited 'less I'm scared, Jimmy, an' I don't get scared till I see somethin'; I'm like a horse."

"Agh, I never seen nobody with less horse sense."

Hooke laughed softly. A high-grader, emboldened by the absence of a reply to his shots, tried to run in closer. Hooke let him come out into the open and bowled him over at a hundred yards. There were no more attempts while daylight lasted.

"GETTIN' dark, Jimmy," Hooke declared, some time later. "Let's be on our way."

"Where to?"

"Look for the canoe—swipe their launch—swim for it if we have to."

"Swimmin' be damned; you know I can't swim a rod."

"Well, we got to move. We got one bulge on this outfit anyway; anybody we meet's no pal of ours. Hit him first is our motto tonight. No shootin'; take aholt of this."

He handed Jimmy a short club he had been fashioning through the day.

They reached the alders safely, and then a knot of dark figures blocked their path.

"Who dat?" questioned a voice.

"Let 'em have it," snapped Hooke.

His own club cracked a skull, Jimmy knocked another off his feet, then they fled into the thicket, pursued by yells and pistol bullets.

"Looks like we're goin' to raise a pile of hell around here," commented Hooke.

"What I want is get off of this damned island," said Jimmy peevishly. "That an' get something to eat."

"All right; just as quick as we find a boat."

"Where in hell are we at?" inquired Jimmy after several minutes of twisting and turning among the close-growing alder stems.

"That's what the other fellers are askin'. Let's try this way."

They encountered two men whose hesitation before shooting gave them a chance to dive back into cover. They found themselves at the water's edge, and somebody hailed them. Their quick retreat brought a volley, and there was again a confused chase in the darkness among the alders. They were only saved because wild shooting imperilled the high-graders themselves.

Finally they were driven out of the bush to the foot of a slope of bare rock. A panting run brought them out on the backbone of the island.

"Now what?" gasped Jimmy.

"The cave—only show we have."

"Man, you're crazy."

"When you're in a jam work your nerve. We'll show these garlic-eaters a few."

They came clattering and slithering down the side of the ravine. A single figure lounged at the cave mouth, listening to the clamour beyond the ridge. He looked up to see the two menacing figures plunging down upon him, gave a yell and fled down the ravine.

They found the cave lit by a single lantern and unoccupied. "Hustle an' dig up all the guns and ammunition you can before the gang gets here," directed Hooke.

They found several automatic pistols, a couple of rifles, and numerous boxes of ammunition. Hooke prudently put out the lantern, and they took up their position on the floor on each side of the entrance.

"Now see how they like it," said

Hooke. "We got their cave, an' their grub an' plenty ammunition—we can hold 'em a week."

"But how the devil are we goin' to get out?"

"Oh, we'll call up an' get a taxi to come for us, like they do in Noo York."

"Damn fool."

"Sssh, here's our little friends comin' to call—set out the best chairs."

"A man what never quits jokin' is a damn fool," stated Jimmy.

"When a feller quits jokin' he might as well die," was Hooke's reply.

Steve's voice hailed them from the ravine: "Hello, in dere."

"Hello, hello, fine evenin'. Come on in an' set," invited Hooke.

"Vot's dat?"

"Just invitin' you in for a little talk. But we can't use more than one at a time."

"Are you detectifs?"

"No, just prospectors."

"Oh, den ve make a mistook. Ve t'ink you are detectif—ve don't vant hurt you."

"Well, you ain't done it yet, but you gone through the motions plenty."

"Dat vas a mistook; ve are sorry for dat. You come out from dere an' ve be good friends vit' you now. Ve make it all right vit' you."

"That's what the coyote said to the rooster. Best not come any closer, an' tell your friends there'll be shootin' if they don't back up. We can see you a whole lot better than you can see us."

"You von't come out, eh?"

"No, this here night air is bad for us."

"Ha-ha, you t'ink dat fonny, eh? Vell now, ve gif you a leetle present. You like it maybe."

He ducked down behind the rock that had partly concealed him. At the same time a man who had crept along the opposite side of the ravine stood up and hurled something that trailed red sparks behind it, and took to his heels.

"Down," yelled Hooke and flung himself flat.

The missile, a single stick of dynamite with a fuse attached, exploded with a terrific concussion just within the entrance. Great lumps of rock fell from the roof, and the place was filled with stifling fumes.

Some mysterious good fortune preserved Hooke from anything but a few knocks from flying stones, but Jimmy was hurled against the wall and partially stunned.

With a yell the high-graders rushed, their automatics crackling like so many giant firecrackers. Hooke snatched up the weapons he had laid out on the ground before him and blazed into the mob. The rush checked, swayed back, and faded into the darkness, leaving a man kicking on the ground.

"More dinnamit'; bring de whole case," roared Steve's voice. "Ve blow dem to hell. You come out of dere, or ve bring de whole vorks on your head. You hear me?"

"We hear you, but we ain't payin' much attention," answered Hooke.

"You pay 'tention now—ve show you. Just vait till de more dinnamit' is here."

"How you feelin', Jimmy?" inquired Hooke. "I dassn't leave here."

"I got a bad head," came Jimmy's despondent voice. "Can't you make a dicker with 'em—they'll get us sure."

"Not by a jugful," declared Hooke confidently. "We won't let 'em sneak up on us like that another time. If we did come out, d'you think for a moment they'd let us go? Not this outfit. We wouldn't be the first they've killed, neither. Take another think, man. We got to stand 'em off or attend our own funeral, and, by gosh, we can do it."

A high-grader attempted to creep up, but halted and sought cover with a hungry bullet buzzing at his ear. From behind a boulder he hurled his bomb. It burst short.

"They can do that all night," said Hooke. "Just fireworks."

"I hate the stink of the stuff," coughed Jimmy, as a wisp of white floated up. "Makes my head worse."

"Get a little further back an' keep your face close to the floor. Cheer up, old scout, this is just fun.".

The next bomb was flung from above, but the overhanging ledge tossed it far out and it did no harm.

"What'd I tell you?" said Hooke.

The third, however, made of several sticks of dynamite bound together, did serious damage. A mass of rock slid down from the side of the ravine and blocked half the doorway.

"If they do like that on the other side," commented the irrepressible Hooke, "everything'll be jake. They won't be able to get at us nor we won't need to bother with them, an' that's the way I like it."

"You're damn easy satisfied," grumbled Jimmy.

"A poor man's got to be. Now what are they doin'?"

"Quit, Hooky," begged Jimmy. "They got us."

"You're all wrong, boy, we got them."

Another terrific explosion and the rumble and clatter of sliding rock. Hooke crawled forward in an effort to see what was going on, but received a cut on the forehead with a flying stone.

Even then he would not admit he was beaten. "Everything goin' fine," he declared, wiping the trickling blood from his eyes. "Luck right with us. They'll be right out of dynamite in a little."

But Jimmy had given way to despair. "We're done," he mumbled, "but I'd like to get a crack at another garlic-eater before I pass out."

"That's the stuff, old scout," said Hooke in the most cheerful tones. "They'll get tired before we do."

A bold spirit crept up and tossed a stick of dynamite accurately in at the entrance. It fell near them, glowing and sputtering evilly. With a shout, Jimmy flung himself to the far end of the cave, but Hooke took a quick step and ground the fuse out under his heel.

"Well, by gosh, if we ain't got a little firecracker of our own to play with," he exulted. "Just what I been lookin' for."

"Either you got no sense or you got more nerve than the devil," said Jimmy morosely. "I wouldn't touch a live fuse for a million dollars. Watch out, here comes another."

This fell just within the entrance, out of reach. Hooke had to fly, and the pair scrambled up the ore pile as the cave was shaken with the explosion. Their eardrums were almost burst by a second explosion hard on the heels of the first.

"I'm goin'," coughed Jimmy in the suffocating fumes, and fell limp.

Hooke dragged him to the extreme end of the cave, where a little current of fresh air flowed in, and sat down to wait. He still clutched the unexploded bomb in his hand. When all other hope was gone he intended to throw it, but not before.

There was a long pause. At the entrance of the cave, now reduced to a small hole, the high-graders gathered in a doubtful group.

"Hello, in dere," shouted Steve.

Hooke hesitated. If he answered they would fling in another bomb, and he felt that he could not survive the fumes even if he were not killed by the explosion. He could not lift the inert and heavy Jimmy up into the chamber behind the cave, or hope to make the trip through the passage a second time. In the end he sat still and said nothing.

"I tell you dem last shots fix 'em," urged Steve to his followers.

"Vell, you go firs' in, an' den ve come."

"You come, sure?"

"You go firs' an' ve all come."

Quivering all over, Hooke crouched behind the ore pile, the stick of dynamite in one hand, a match in the other. If he could get them altogether and throw his bomb among them, possibly he and Jimmy might yet escape with their lives.

The high-graders were busy widening the mouth of the cave. Hooke tried to rouse Jimmy, but unavailingly. For

a moment he was tempted to leave him and seek his own safety—the way was still open. Then he patted the limp hand.

"Well, we toughed her together fer quite a while now," he said. "I guess we'll see her through."

The high-graders were cautiously entering the cave, talking in loud voices to keep their courage up.

"Ve got dem, dem last shots fix um," declared Steve confidently. "I light a match an' show you."

"You be careful dat match," warned a voice.

"Ah, shute, man, you scare. See."

The match flared, showing momentarily the wild disorder in the cavern, the stores tossed in all directions, the huge stones fallen from the crumbling roof.

And then Hooke scratched his own match and held it to the tiny stub of fuse. There was a unanimous howl of terror; some one fired at him, but most of the high-graders were fighting in a compact mass to get out. But the cavemouth was too narrow, and their panic too complete. . . .

The stick fell at their heels. Once more the cave filled with thunder, poisonous fumes and whizzing stones. With a deep warning rumble, the whole roof fell in. Something struck Hooke on the head and stunned him.

HOOKE opened his eyes on a sky gray with dawn. Jimmy, his face drawn and haggard and smeared with dried blood, was holding his head in his lap. He gave a hoarse exclamation of joy.

"Boy, I thought you was dead; you been layin' there like a corpse."

A whimsical smile spread slowly over Hooke's battered face. "I thought I was dead too," he admitted. "I ain't but half alive now. What happened to the high-graders?"

"Damned if I know; I ain't seen none of 'em. Likely they're down in under them rocks. I come to, layin' under a great big flat piece of rock that was held up on one corner, and you beside me, like a dead man. I had strength enough to ease you out of there, but I couldn't get you no further."

Hooke slowly and cautiously rose and stretched himself, tenderly feeling his various cuts and bruises and the great lump on his head, but glad to find no bones broken.

"How you feelin'?" he inquired.

"Got a gosh-awful head on me an' sick at the stummick."

"That all? Well, I think we been pretty damn lucky."

"Yeah? Well, if this is your notion of good luck, I hope I ain't with you when you run into bad luck. Let's get to blazes out of here."

Read

Waddy Unwhipped

By Stephen Payne

An Outstanding Yarn by an Outstanding Author

In the Next Issue of ACE-HIGH—On Sale, February 6th

BIG ROWELS

By Francis W. Hilton

Clee Sanborn came to Moskee to find the range seething with hatred and mistrust. The job the cowmen gave him was a big one; one that needed a keen brain and a steady gun-hand—and the friendship of a range kid who was a real pard.

THE stamp of booted feet and the noisy jangle of huge rowels on the walk outside broke the tension that pervaded the Bald Eagle Saloon in the Wyoming cowtown of Moskee that raw day in early April. The score or more of cowmen hugging the red-hot stove started nervously, yet with something of relief for the interruption on their haggard faces. They watched the door expectantly. For what perhaps not one of them knew.

Certainly not for trouble. The Moskee range had plenty of that. Trouble had brought the cattlemen together that day; trouble in the form of rustlers. Bold, slippery rustlers who were cutting deep into the herds.

For weeks the distraught ranchers had tried to solve the mystery of their disappearing cattle. They rode constantly, guarded their herds by night, employed detectives, offered rewards. Everything failed. Every man was under suspicion. The whole range seethed with hatred and mistrust. At last, in desperation, the ranchers had forced "Mitch" Slade, owner of the big "T Six" outfit, and president of the Maverick County Stock Association, to call a meeting of that body.

Arrogant and brutal was Slade, a huge hulk of a man with a red, pouchy face and roving little eyes that never looked squarely at anything. A man who scorned friendship, the unscrupulous Slade's prestige lay in his vast holdings and his money. He was the king of the Moskee range, tolerated by the other ranchers, but nevertheless dominating them through fear.

After numerous delays, Slade finally had called the meeting in the Bald Eagle. But from the outset his opposition to it was apparent. In fact, from

the moment he entered the saloon with his foreman, Dan Moody—a burly, evil-faced fellow, notorious for his recklessness and vicious temper—the waiting cattlemen were made to feel his ugly mood.

"I s'pose you jaspers are satisfied now?" Slade sneered, while Moody fell to drinking. "Get to augerin' if you think it'll do any good."

"Discussin' things is the only way to get organized to scrap the rustlers," old Jeb Carter of the "Lazy C" retorted caustically. "We're up again' a proposition of findin' summer range where we won't all get cleaned out." He dropped into a chair to pat the tow head of a boy who stood beside him. "Warm, sonny?" he asked.

"Uh-huh!" Of all the group, old Jeb's motherless boy, Jerry, a manly, serious-faced youngster just into his teens, clad in goat-hair chaps and huge reefer, was the only one who seemed to be enjoying the affair.

"Summer range!" Slade flung at Carter. "The T Six ain't worryin' over summer range. We'll run our stuff on upper Dugout just where we always have." There was no love between Slade and old Jeb, one of the few who had dared condemn the T Six for the high-handed manner in which it usurped the range. Slade made no bones of his hatred for Carter; had even gone so far as to boast openly that the day would come when he would crush the doughty old Jeb.

"Upper Dugout!" Carter exclaimed. "Why that's the heart of the rustler country!"

"You're the only one who knows it is!" Slade retorted in a tone that drained the color from old Jeb's leathery face. "But the T Six don't care a damn what you do. It summers on upper Dugout. Moody an' my men are goin' healed heavy. An' we've got a good idea who we'll grab."

"Who?" demanded the others, breaking into the conversation.

"Carter is the only member of the Association livin' on Dugout!" Slade replied with brutal emphasis. "He's sayin' the rustlers hang out there. He knows who the T Six is gunnin' fer!"

The veiled charge sent a gasp through the crowd. Shoving the boy aside old Jeb bounded to his feet.

"Are you intimatin' that I'm rustlin'?" he thundered.

"I ain't intimatin' nothin'," Slade sneered, shooting a quick glance at Moody, who upset his half-emptied bottle as he lurched around to brace himself against the bar and stare drunkenly at the group. "I'm tellin' you plain. You give your hand away sayin' the rustlers hole-up on Dugout. An' this here Association is goin' to blackball you till you prove—"

He got no farther. A snarl twisted old Jeb's whitened lips. Pushing the boy roughly behind him he started for his gun.

"Naw you don't, you ol' polecat!" Moody cried thickly, whipping out his forty-five and reeling away from the bar to stand swaying on his feet, a leer on his evil face, the stub of an unlighted cigarette sticking to his lower lip. "I'm set fer you. You an' that brat take a sneak er I'll drill you both. An' remember, what the boss says about Lazy C stuff bein' blackballed goes!"

There were those in the crowd who opened their mouths to protest. But Moody whirled on them savagely. One glimpse of the reckless fury in his bloodshot eyes left them mute.

Only the boy, Jerry, had the temerity to speak. "Paw ain't no rustler!" he cried in a high-pitched voice. "An' some day I'll get you fer sayin' it! You an' Mitch Slade too!" He lunged for Moody, his fists clenched, his body quivering with rage.

A violent oath left Moody's lips. For a moment his gun menaced the furious boy. Forgetful of his own anger in the face of Jerry's peril, old Jeb seized hold of him and dragged him, shrieking and kicking, to the door, jerked it open and banged it shut behind them.

An ominous silence settled over the saloon. Moments passed; moments filled with sinister portent that keyed nerves to the snapping point. No one moved save Moody. He shook himself drunkenly, holstered his gun and lurched around to pour another drink.

Then from outside came that noisy jangle of huge rowels. The door swung open. A puncher ducked inside, shut it quickly against the raw wind.

Every eye was focused upon the newcomer, a broad-shouldered, slender-hipped stranger with piercing black eyes. There was youth in his lean tanned face, but his jaws were square and hard and the prairie had left her indelible stamp upon it. Slouched against the bar, Moody sized the newcomer up in a single glance. Then his gaze fell to his spurs. They were short of shank and large of rowel.

"Howdy, gents!" the cowboy greeted in a friendly fashion. "Cold, ain't it?" He moved to the stove rubbing his hands, the scrape of his huge rowels on the board floor grating on taut nerves.

"Who the hell said it wasn't cold, Big Rowels?" Moody leered drunkenly. "Where'd you make the raise of them spurs?"

The cowboy smiled; a cold, lifeless smile that braced his lips in a thin grim line across his teeth. But he said nothing. If he even noticed the frozen atmosphere that had greeted his entry he gave no sign as he warmed himself beside the roaring stove.

"You're from Texas, er New Mexico, er mebbeso hell," Moody sneered. "Nobody but a damn Border breed'd wear show rowels like them."

A tightening of the muscles of the puncher's square jaws was the only indication that he even heard the slur. Mistaking his silence for fear, the liquor-fired Moody rushed on recklessly.

"We take spurs like them away from tinhorns an' shag 'em off this range, Big Rowels!" he snarled.

Then the newcomer spoke. "Who do you get to help you?" he asked.

"Huh?" Moody blinked, shook his head as though to convince himself he had heard aright and lurched away from the bar.

"Don't need no help!" he bawled. "I take 'em off myself."

"Fly to it!" the puncher challenged.

"Tough, ain't you?" Moody snarled, backing off to stand spread-legged, thumbs hooked in his cartridge belt. "What the hell do you want in Moskee anyhow, you big-roweled buzzard?"

"Work," the puncher answered coolly.

"What kind of work?" Moody demanded.

"I'd like a job cleanin' out a few big-mouthed, drunken bums like you," the puncher shot back. "But seein' as how there ain't nothin' open in that line I reckon I'll have to be satisfied with a ridin' job."

"You lousy sidewinder!" Moody snarled. "There's a job here fer a tough jasper like you. Gunnin' fer rustlers."

"You one of 'em?" the puncher asked with maddening calm.

"No, I ain't one of 'em!" Moody thundered. "An' I can kill the skunk who says I am. You ain't got the guts to go gunnin' fer rustlers, have you, Big Rowels?"

"I've got guts enough to tackle anything," the cowboy retorted, moving over to lean against the bar. "Er anybody," he added meaningly.

"I just run one guy out of here," Moody fumed. "An' I'm about to do the same with you. Strangers is p'ison in Moskee."

"Yeah?" The puncher's drawl was filled with venom.

"Yeah!" Moody leered. "You get to hell out of here!"

He waited for an instant. The cowboy only shrugged and smiled insolently. With a swift downward movement Moody snatched for his forty-five. It stuck in its holster. But the strange puncher's didn't. With the speed of a puma he bounded away from the bar to land half-crouched before the dumbfounded Moody and fire from his hip.

The T Six foreman let forth an agonized cry, spun about dizzily and crumpled in his tracks. Slade sprang to his side.

"You've shot my foreman, you big-roweled—" he began hoarsely.

"Damn your foreman!" the cowboy flung back. "He was itchin' fer a scrap an' he got it." His darting black eyes swept Slade from head to foot. "You ain't heeled," he observed. "But if you feel hostile I'll take you on rough an' tumble." Holstering his forty-five, he threw up his guard.

But with Moody writhing on the floor, clutching a bleeding forearm, the cowardly Slade had no stomach for an encounter with the fearless newcomer. He resorted to bluff.

"I don't need no gun with trail-drifters like you," he bawled. "You get to hell out of here er I'll have you locked up."

Then a strange thing happened. With a champion who had dared face Moody and was now defying Slade the stunned cowmen all found their voices at once. One shout came clear above the clamor that suddenly arose.

"Not on your life he ain't goin', Slade! If he's on the square he's got a job right here."

"What doin'?" Slade demanded.

"Gunnin' fer them rustlers, that's what!" came back a dozen voices. "This jasper's got guts. The only man we ever had in Moskee who showed Dan Moody where to head in. The Association's goin' to hire him."

"Like hell it is!" Slade blazed. "The big-roweled, trail-driftin' skunk may be a rustler himself fer all—"

A terrific smash in the mouth silenced him. He rocked on his heels, shook his head savagely. Through hazy eyes he saw the newcomer directly in front of him; recoiled from his fist that had landed like a sledge-hammer.

"No jasper ever called me a rustler an' got away with it," the puncher was challenging the crowd. "I'm Clee Sanborn. I'm from the Panhandle. Huntin' work. My record's as clean as any of yours. I'll take your job. An' if these two coyotes—" indicating the stunned Slade and the groaning Moody —"are the toughest thing you've got on this range I'll guarantee to get your rustlers fer you, too!"

"You don't get the job!" Slade found his voice to bellow. "I'm head of the—"

But after all their years of subserviency the Moskee cattlemen had turned. "He does get the job!" they cried. "Ever' member of the Association is here but Jeb Carter. An' we're unanimous in hirin' Clee Sanborn."

"If I don't get your rustlers it won't cost you a cent," Clee offered.

"An' if you do we'll pay you a hundred bucks a head fer 'em," someone shouted before the furious Slade could speak. "The Association is orderin' you as president to sign this waddy up, Slade."

For the first time Mitch Slade was forced to bow to the will of the stockmen of Moskee. "All right," he muttered sullenly. "But you jaspers'll be sorry you ever tied up with—" he paused to glare at Clee, who was watching him like a hawk—"with Big Rowels!" he finished lamely.

With that he helped the now sober and thoroughly cowed Moody to his feet, led him to the door and slammed it behind them.

MANY times during the days that followed Clee Sanborn—for whom Moskee folk quickly adopted the nickname of "Big Rowels"—cursed himself for having mixed into the affair. Without the faintest conception of how to go about being a detective, still, now that he had made his play he was grimly determined to back it up.

Despite his set-to with Slade in the Bald Eagle the day of his arrival he found the rancher eagerly willing to assist him as were all the other cattlemen with the exception of Moody, who went about nursing his wounded arm and swearing vengeance.

Having signed Clee up to work for the Association as the others had demanded, Slade even went so far as to insist that he make the T Six his headquarters. Clee had accepted the invitation with misgivings. Somehow he could not convince himself that Slade's sudden friendliness was real.

At first he had balked at carrying the "C S" iron that Slade, in the name of the Association, furnished him to brand mavericks he ran across. But when Slade pointed out that but one man, Jeb Carter of the Lazy C, was not in good standing with the Association —which offered a bounty of five dollars a head for strays—Clee had reluctantly consented to carry the iron.

As for who was rustling, Slade openly accused Carter. Yet after he had heard Jeb's side of the story from others, Clee could not bring himself to believe that the old cowman was guilty. Slade's charges he set down as a deliberate attempt to injure Carter, but, resolved to follow every lead, he kept an eye on Jeb, who went about cursing the Association, Slade and Moody.

Contrary to the advice of Slade, who offered his own services, Clee determined to play a lone hand. To this end he set up a camp in the Dugout brakes and spent hours alone in search of some clue that would lead to identifying the rustlers, who suddenly had ceased operations altogether or were working some undetected racket.

There came an afternoon in late April. Clee had dismounted and crawled to the rim of a bluff to reconnoiter. Below, its scattered pools still fringed with snow and ice, Dugout creek twisted away across a small basin that ended in a jumble of bluffs and brakes a mile beyond. At the lower end of the basin the old stone corrals—landmarks of another day—stood silhouetted on the skyline. Below was the Haver ford—the junction of Dugout and Lodgepole creeks.

For a considerable time he scanned the region. But aside from roving herds in search of forage nothing moved. He was on the point of remounting and riding on when, of a sudden, a handful of dots, like corks on water, bobbed into the face of the setting sun. Dropping down, he crawled to the rim of the bluff. By the square slits of light beneath the dots he knew them to be cattle, running before two horsemen. His gaze flew to the stone corrals, the direction in which they were headed. It was impossible to reach them unobserved. With no alternative he stretched out to watch.

Then the animals were across the ford. The shouts of the two riders as they corralled them drifted to Clee but the distance was too great for him to identify them.

As quickly as the brutes were inside, the horsemen put up the pole gate and roweled away into the brakes.

When they had disappeared, Clee leaped up and ran to his horse. Mounting, and keeping from sight, he raced for the corrals. Reaching them, he swept the brakes for the riders but saw nothing of them. Swinging down, he crawled inside among the wild-eyed staring cattle. A grim smile settled on his lips. They were maverick yearlings!

"Now what's the game?" he pondered. "If these slicks belong to them two jaspers who brought 'em in it's a cinch they'd of branded 'em quick. If they're rustlers they'll be back after night. In that case I'd better brand the critters fer the Association an' then lay fer the gents."

On his guard against surprise, he returned to his horse and untied the C S iron from his saddle only to hesitate, suddenly prey to a vague apprehension.

"These critters are slicks," he finally told himself. "All slicks belong to the Association. An' I'm hired to brand 'em with this C S iron fer the Association."

Locating some drift cottonwood, he kindled a small fire near the gate. But several times as he fanned it to a blaze and placed the iron therein, he came near to extinguishing it. The more he

argued with himself the more suspicious he became that somehow the mavericks were planted. Yet ponder the thing as he would he could not see how branding them for the Association could implicate him.

As he squatted on his heels, waiting for the iron to heat, a glittering object beside the gate caught his eye. Securing it, he examined it curiously. It was a spur rowel almost as large as his own! But a hasty glance showed him that neither of his rowels was missing.

"One of them two jaspers lost it!" he mused. "An' nobody I've seen on this range wears big rowels but me. I ain't no detective but if this ain't a clue I'll eat my hat."

Elated at the discovery, he pocketed the rowel. Taking down his lariat he whirled out the kinks and crawled into the corral to rope and tie one of the yearlings. This done he returned to the fire, seized up the cherry-red iron and went on a run to its side.

DUSK had settled over the basin when the last blatting brute had struggled to its feet with a C S seared into its side. Clee wiped the sweat from his forehead and ground the iron in the dirt to cool it. Then dropping the corral poles he ran the critters outside and started for his horse.

A bullet "pinged" over his head. He dropped in his tracks to lay scarcely breathing for an instant. Then he bellied to cover behind the bottom pole of the corral. Raising himself cautiously, he peered over. A swift glance revealed nothing.

A second bullet crashing against his barricade sent him ducking down.

"That ain't no forty-five," was the thought that flashed through his mind. "That's a rifle. An' the jasper usin' it sure knows how."

Fearful to look again, he scooped the dirt from beneath the pole and, wriggling sidewise, stretched out to peer underneath. Directly opposite, resting on the bottom pole of the corral, was a rifle barrel! Almost at the instant a third bullet smashed against his shelter, drilled through the dry cottonwood. A ripping pain sliced his scalp. His muscles twitched spasmodically. A nauseating dizziness assailed him. Blood trickled down his face. He fought stubbornly against a curtain of darkness that flapped before his hazy eyes. Then blackness overcame him.

NUMBING cold brought Clee Sanborn back to his senses. He was shivering violently. His head was pounding. He opened his aching eyes. A huge yellow moon was drenching the basin with an eerie, ghostly light.

Presently he became aware of someone near him. With an effort he raised himself onto his elbow. Bending over him was a frightened boy.

"Gosh, I'm glad you come to, mister," the boy cried with relief. "I was scared you was dead. An' I didn't want to be out here alone with a dead man at night."

"Don't blame you, sonny," Clee gasped, grasping the corral poles and climbing hand over hand to his feet to stand swaying drunkenly. "How long you been here?"

"Just come," the boy answered. "Was huntin' my cows an' seen you layin' here. What happened, mister?"

"See anybody else around?" Clee panted, peering about.

"Nary a soul," the boy replied. "Did your hoss pile you, mister?"

"Somebody shot me," Clee said grimly.

"Shot you?" the boy cried. "Bet it was that on'ry Mitch Slade er Dan Moody! They'd shoot anybody."

"I'd like to get a crack at 'em if it was," Clee muttered. "But it's pretty late fer kids to be out, sonny. What's your name?"

"I'm Jerry Carter. Paw owns the Lazy C. But you're a stranger—"

"You'd better be joggin' along home, Jerry," Clee interrupted. "Your paw'll be worryin'."

"An' leave you here shot?" the boy flashed. "Not on your life, mister. Us

Carters ain't that kind. Paw'd rawhide me if he thought I'd leave a crippled jasper to take care of himself."

"Not if he knowed who I was," Clee muttered bitterly.

"Hump, paw ain't got no cause to hate you, mister," Jerry said. "He only hates Mitch Slade an' Dan Moody. If you was a Slade man I'd let you lay here ferever. But I'm bettin' you ain't. What's your name, mister?"

"Clee Sanborn." Again Clee was fighting against the nauseating wave of dizziness.

"Where do you belong?"

The thought came to Clee to be honest with the manly youngster. But his head had started throbbing sickeningly. The blood roared in his ears. His knees were like tallow. He needed help. Hating the Association as old Jeb Carter did he could expect none if his real identity was disclosed.

"I'm from over in the Dugout brakes, sonny," he gasped.

"I knowed you wasn't a Slade man," Jerry exclaimed exultantly. "I liked you the minute I seen you layin' here —Big Rowels."

"Big Rowels?" Clee panted, backing against the corral for support. "Then you know—"

"Know what?" Jerry cut in to demand. "I know you've got the biggest rowels I ever seen. I'd sure like to have a pair of spurs like them."

"Mebbeso I can pick you up a pair sometime," Clee said weakly. "But right now—"

"Gosh, I'd be your pard fer life, Big Rowels!" the boy cried. He sprang forward as Clee started down. "Buck up," he urged, ducking under Clee's arm and attempting to support his weight. "I'll take you to the ranch. If you can get onto your hoss I can pilot you."

With the aid of the boy the half-conscious Clee lurched to his horse. Clutching the horn grimly, he dragged himself into the saddle.

"I — can — make — it — Jerry," he choked. "Where's—your—hoss?"

The boy darted away to come galloping back. "Hang on, mister," he ordered. "We're goin' to hit 'er up."

Clee Sanborn never knew how he managed to ride to the Lazy C that night. Only at times did he hear the boy's ceaseless chatter. Occasionally his head cleared enough for him to catch glimpses of greasewood and sage that loomed in the moonlight like hideous creatures of a nightmare. Reeling and exhausted, he saw the buildings of the Lazy C swaying like phantoms before him; heard Jerry urging him to hold out. Admiration for the manly youngster filled Clee's heart; admiration and gratitude for his timely aid. He hated himself for the deceit he had employed to get help at the Lazy C. But in the morning he would tell the lad; beg his forgiveness for not coming clean and revealing his connection with the Association—and Slade.

AGAIN Clee Sanborn groped back to consciousness. His eyelids twitched but refused to open. His body seemed numb but the terrific pain in his head—which he knew had been bandaged—had subsided. From far away came a voice.

"He might have told you he was Clee Sanborn, Jerry," a man was saying, "but he's the new range detective fer the Association. He's a Slade man."

"I don't believe it," Jerry's voice rose hotly. "He ain't the kind that'd lie to me. He can't be a Slade man er who'd of shot him? You didn't shoot him, did you, paw?"

"No!" old Jeb snorted. "But I'm goin' to shootin' if they don't let up on me. An' the first feller I get's goin' to be that damned rustler you picked up in there!"

Clee's eyes jerked open. As they became accustomed to the light they fell on the figure of Carter pacing back and forth across an adjoining room, the door to which was open. He attempted to speak, to demand an explanation of the rancher but the words would not come.

"You get to bed now, Jerry," old Jeb said.

"All right, paw," the boy answered obediently. "But if that jasper really is a Slade man an' lied to me I'll kick him clean off the place come daylight."

"Don't you open your yawp," Carter warned. "I'll tend to him. You go to bed."

Clee heard the boy stamp away. Then Carter blew out the light and left. Alone in the darkness he fell to pondering Carter's words. But for the life of him he could not fathom their meaning. He gave up finally and fell into a deep sleep disturbed only by the harassing thought that he had not come clean with the boy.

WITH the first streak of dawn Clee climbed stiffly from bed and pulled on his clothes. While he still felt shaky, the sickening throb in his head had ceased. Going outside he encountered Jerry on the porch.

"Much obliged fer helpin' me last night, sonny," he said. "It was mighty white of you."

"Paw says you're a Slade man," Jerry charged hotly.

"I'm not a Slade man," Clee denied. "I'm workin' fer the Association. Slade tried to get me to stay at the T Six but I told you straight when I said my camp was on Dugout."

"You're a detective though," Jerry accused. "An' Slade hired you. Hired you to frame paw."

"Slade couldn't hire me to do anythin'," Clee retorted. "Where is your paw? I want to talk to him."

"Gone to town," Jerry returned sourly. "An' he give the boys orders not to let you leave the place till he got back."

"I'll leave if I feel like it," Clee said grimly. "But before I go I want you to know that I won't fergit what you done fer me last night. An' some day I'll return the favor."

"We'll never have to call on no detective to fight our scraps," Jerry flared. "Ner no Slade jasper neither." His cocky manner vanished. Tears filled his eyes. "Gosha'mighty, Big Rowels," he choked, "I liked you. I wanted you fer a pard. Seems like I've always hankered to team up with a feller like you." He fell to sobbing softly.

Clee blinked hard. "There, there," he gulped, "We can be pards, Jerry."

"But paw's gone to town to—" He checked himself hastily. "But I've got things fixed. Your hoss is saddled an' waitin' yonder behind the barn. You—" He swiped savagely at his tears. "—you ride like hell, Big Rowels!"

"What fer?" Clee questioned, puzzled.

"I can't tell," Jerry whispered. "Do what I say. Get onto that hoss an' travel!"

Try as he would Clee could draw nothing further from the boy. He gave up finally and, under Jerry's guidance, found his horse and mounted.

"I'll go 'cause you seem to figure it's best," Clee said, leaning down to shake hands with the boy. "But remember, we're pards."

At the gate he looked back. Jerry still stood gazing wistfully after him.

Dumbfounded by the boy's strange actions, Clee swung up Dugout. But he had little time to ponder the thing for as he topped a hogback a half mile out from the Lazy C he sighted a rider bearing down on him at a mad pace.

"Jeb Carter's shot!" the puncher shouted as he raced up to drag his lather-splattered horse to its haunches.

"Jeb—Carter—shot?" Clee echoed. "Where?"

"At the stone corrals," the puncher panted, eyeing him suspiciously. "How'd you get away from the ranch?"

"Never mind that," Clee snapped. "Tell me about Carter."

"Him an' me was hittin' fer town through the brakes," the cowboy said excitedly. "Just as we got to the stone corrals they potted the boss. Drilled him through the heart the first shot. Couldn't help old Jeb an' couldn't locate the fellers who done the killin' so I shagged back fer help. But one

thing I can swear to. That killin' was done with a rifle! You come with me."

Without question, Clee roweled alongside the puncher and galloped toward the Lazy C. The cowboy's certainty that the bullet that killed Carter had been fired from a rifle recalled to Clee the barrel of the rifle across the bottom pole of the stone corrals the night before. He cudgeled his brain for recollection of whom he had seen with a rifle. But the Moskee range was a land of revolvers. That, he reasoned, should be something on which to work.

Leaving the puncher to gather the men, Clee rode to the porch, on the steps of which he sighted Jerry.

"What you doin' back here?" the boy demanded blankly. "The fellers are sore as the devil now 'cause you give 'em the slip."

Dismounting, Clee dropped an arm about his shoulders. Gently he told him of what had occurred. Jerry did not wait for him to finish. Leaping up he raced for the corrals where his pony stood saddled. Throwing himself aboard he turned the animal in its tracks and thundered away, Clee pushing his own mount to the limit to keep up.

The Lazy C punchers were pounding at their heels when they arrived at the scene of the crime. They eyed Clee sullenly and, he noticed, quickly maneuvered until they had him almost surrounded. Still at a loss to account for their hostility, he ignored them and prowled about in search of a chance clue while the boy sobbed over the prostrate figure of his father.

After a time Jerry came back to bury his tear-streaked face against his pony's neck.

"Reckon we'd better job along to the ranch now, pard," Clee suggested, mounting. "The boys'll take care of your paw."

"Hold on a minute there, feller!" growled the puncher who had given Clee the news of Carter's death. "You stay here till the sheriff an' coroner gets here."

Clee whirled in his saddle. "I don't know what all this is about!" he snapped. "But nobody's goin' to tell me what I'll do er where I'll go."

"You might change your tune," the puncher growled. "You're stayin' here."

"He's goin' with me!" Jerry blazed before the thunderstruck Clee could reply. "Paw's gone. I'm runnin' the Lazy C!"

The outburst was typical of a boy. Yet to Clee's amazement the Lazy C punchers fell away. He stared at Jerry. There was fire in the youngster's eyes.

"Come on, pard," the boy said, swinging up. "Reckon that'll hold 'em!"

Clee rode shifted sidewise in his saddle looking back. But apparently the boy's word was as much law with the Lazy C punchers as old Jeb's had been. For they made no move to stop him.

Once away from the corrals, Clee again fell to turning the swift-moving events over in his mind. He groaned inwardly at his helplessness. Much as he wanted to help the boy who rode beside him, his tearful gaze riveted on his pony's ears, he could not. He cursed himself for his failure to get at the bottom of a single thing that had occurred. But out of that bitter self-condemnation came one decision. Finding old Jeb's slayer was far more important than hunting rustlers.

"Mitch Slade er Dan Moody killed paw!" Jerry startled him by saying.

"Don't say that," Clee admonished. "You've got to have proof fer a serious charge like that."

"I've got proof!" Jerry cried. "Right here!" He beat his breast fiercely. "Somethin' tells me in here that Slade er Moody done it. Big Rowels?" he asked, his eyes pleading. "Will you do somethin' fer me?"

Clee rode close to pat his shoulder. "We're pards, Jerry," he said gravely. "I'm quittin' the Association just to see if I can't run down this thing. What do you want, sonny?"

"You can get onto the T Six," the boy said. "You travel on up there."

"What'll I do up there?" Clee asked blankly.

"See if Mitch Slade an' Dan Moody is both there?" Jerry directed sagely. "If they are they ain't guilty. If they ain't—hurry, pard, I'll be at the ranch waitin'!"

To humor the youngster and to get away by himself where he could mull over the baffling problems, Clee whirled his horse and roweled toward the T Six. Jerry watched him until he disappeared, then, instead of going on to the Lazy C, he galloped back toward the stone corrals.

MITCH SLADE started as a shadow fell across his desk in the T Six ranch house. He straightened up quickly to toss a pair of spurs, which he had just taken off, into a corner.

"Oh, howdy, Sanborn!" he greeted. "Come on in."

"Howdy!" Clee entered the open door to drop into a chair.

"What's on your mind?" Slade seated himself and twisted a cigarette.

"I'm quittin' the Association work," Clee said shortly.

"Yeah?" If he had made the announcement in the hope that Slade would question him he was doomed to disappointment. For aside from the single query the rancher said nothing. Seconds passed; seconds of strained silence. Presently Clee moved; loosened his gun in its holster, his eyes never leaving Slade's face.

With a nervous gesture Slade lifted his hat to run his fingers up over his brow and through his hair. There were beads of sweat on his forehead and his hair was damp.

"Been down to the stone corrals lately?" Clee asked casually.

"Ain't been off the place fer a week," Slade answered.

"Carter was killed down there this mornin'!"

Clee could have sworn that Slade's muscles tensed, yet the movement was so slight as to be almost imperceptible. "So the boys heard over the phone awhile ago," he said.

Still staring at the rancher, Clee noticed again, as he had in the Bald Eagle the day of his arrival, that Slade carried no sidearms. But he also noted a rifle propped against the desk. A question formed in his mind. How had Slade, physical coward that he had proved himself in the Bald Eagle, run rough-shod over the Moskee range without a gun?

With uncanny perception the rancher read his thoughts.

"Never pack a gun," he blurted out. "Never need one an' I can't shoot worth a damn anyhow. What you quittin' fer?"

The question gave Clee an opening. Yet now that he had it he did not know how to proceed. The fact that Slade carried no revolver yet had a rifle propped against his desk held his interest. There came to him an impulse; an impulse so utterly wild and reckless that he had voiced it before he even realized its danger.

"Several things," he found himself saying as he got to his feet, "chief among 'em bein' 'cause I won't work fer rustlers—er—killers!"

Slade sprang up, his face suddenly bloodless. Before he was on his feet he had clutched the rifle. Clee's heart leaped. Crazy as had been his impulse it had served its purpose. It had proved that Slade's first thought in a crisis was of that rifle!

A shadow flitted across the open doorway and a figure stood framed within. Clee dared a glance. It was Moody, forty-five in hand! The moment was fraught with tragedy. Clee experienced a clammy sensation. His nerves twanged with tautness.

"What do you mean, rustlers er killers?" Slade's voice, now that help was at hand, took on the chill of steel. He pulled the rifle onto the desk.

Clee cursed himself inwardly for the predicament into which he had allowed that crazy impulse to draw him; cursed

himself for not thinking of Moody. That he had whipped them both before was small comfort now. He was cornered, trapped like a beast with no way to turn. His roving eyes flew back to the rancher whose finger was on the trigger-guard of the rifle.

"Spit it out!" Slade snarled.

Clee's eyes were everywhere as he sparred for time. Slade shifted his weight. The scrape of his boots grated on singing nerves. Clee's gaze traveled upward from those boots to the spurs he had seen Slade toss into the corner. He started violently. One of the rowels of those spurs was missing! He had found it at the stone corrals the night before. Slade then had lied when he said he hadn't been away from the ranch for a week! The discovery braced his lips in a thin grim line across his teeth.

"That's what I said!" he barked. "Rustlers an' killers!"

Moody jerked. His gun wavered. Slade's finger left the trigger-guard to drum nervously on the stock. He touched his tongue to parched lips. His eyelid fluttered—a signal to Moody. Without turning, Clee sensed the foreman's finger growing taut on the trigger of his forty-five. Still he was powerless. But one thing gave him hope. Moody's start at the word—

"Killers!" he bawled. As before Moody jerked with muscular violence. Clee's gun sprang to his hand, spat flame. Moody's knees buckled. He wilted to the floor, blood spurting from a sagging shoulder.

"An' you, Slade!" Again it was the Big Rowels of the Bald Eagle. "Drop —that—rifle!"

Slade's face was pasty. His hands shot into the air.

"You're slick, Slade—" Clee began only to stop and whirl to face the door as the T Six punchers, attracted by the shot, leaped into the room, guns drawn. Sight of the men gave Slade new courage.

"You wanted trouble, jasper," he snarled, "now you've got it. We're goin' to swing you high fer rustlin'. Throw down that gun!"

"Rustlin'?" Clee gasped.

"That's what I said," Slade sneered. "The yearlin' slicks you branded at the stone corrals last night were Carter's!"

"But I branded 'em fer the Association!" Clee retorted. "With the iron you gave me."

"I never gave you no iron," Slade lied brazenly. "Ner the Association don't know nothin' about no iron. Them yearlin's was branded C S. It's your own initials, registered in your name!"

In a flash the thing unfolded to Clee. Slade had tricked him in getting him to carry the iron. Slade had planted the Carter mavericks in the stone corral knowing that he would brand them. Carter somehow had discovered it and thought him a rustler. That explained Jerry's stealth in getting him away from the Lazy C; explained the hostility of the punchers. His suspicion of Slade's friendliness then had been justified. But too late had he—

He swept the faces about him. Slade had surrounded himself with men of his own weak kidney. Yet there were six of them, not including the rancher, who had picked up the rifle. To move the gun at his hip would bring down a hail of lead. He could account for two, possibly three but—

From the corner of his eye he saw Moody crawling through the doorway. The silence was horrible. He could feel the cold perspiration popping out on his brow.

From without came a shout. The punchers whirled. Clee opened up. His forty-five barked four times. Two of the cowboys went down screaming. The others dropped their guns, shot their hands into the air.

A gaunt man with a badge on his vest bounded into the room. Behind came someone who paused to sweep the set faces in affright.

"Jerry!" Clee cried. "I thought you was at the Lazy C. Get out of here!"

"Like hell I will!" cried the boy.

"After you'd come I figured you'd have trouble. So I waited at the stone corrals fer the sheriff an' brung him along. Thought you'd need him but—" He glanced disdainfully at the cowed punchers backed against the wall—"I reckon you don't, Big Rowels."

The sheriff disarmed the group and examined the wounded men. Jerry planted himself in front of Slade. "Who killed paw?" he demanded. "You er Moody?"

"Tell him, Slade!" Clee ordered in a voice that deepened the pallor of the cowman's cheeks.

"How the hell do I know who killed your paw?" Slade snarled.

"He'll tell before long, pard," Clee said. "Meantime I'll tell you. Slade killed your paw. With a rifle. An' he's the white-livered cur that come danged nigh scalpin' me with that same rifle last night!"

"You lie!" Slade bawled. "Damn you, you've got to prove cracks like that."

"I can prove it!" Clee shot back. From his pocket he fished the spur rowel and tossed it onto the desk. "You left that at the stone corrals last night," he snapped. "Whether you lost it er planted it so's I'd be sure to get caught by its size I don't know. It's out of your spurs yonder. The ones you took off just as I come in—right behind you from the stone corrals, Slade!"

Slade's face twisted with fury. "Your word won't go far agin mine after I talk, you lousy rustler!" he leered.

"Rustler?" The sheriff pricked up his ears. "Who's a rustler?"

"He is!" Slade shouted. "He branded Carter's slicks at the stone corrals last night. Now he's got the guts to say I give him the iron; an Association iron when it's his own initials an' registered in his name. But Carter was wise to him."

"An' you was scared he was wise to you, too!" Clee charged. "I've been blind as a bat but I can see things now. You framed me with that iron; planted Carter's slicks so's I'd brand 'em. You plugged me thinkin' Carter'd get the blame. You went back this mornin' figurin' to find me dead. Carter come damned near catchin' you. You had to kill him to keep him from stumbling onto the whole deal."

"Your lies ain't gettin' you nowheres!" Slade sneered. "They don't keep you from bein' a rustler."

"Big Rowels ain't a rustler!" Jerry defended hotly.

"If brandin' Lazy C critters with his own iron ain't rustlin' I'd like to know what it is!" Slade flared.

In a land where rustling came as near to being the unpardonable sin as murder itself, Clee could not help but realize the seriousness of his predicament. The evidence he had collected against Slade was purely circumstantial. But the Carter yearlings with their C S brand were living proof of his crime. And crime he knew Slade, the power of Moskee, could make it appear.

"Big Rowels has got a right to brand Lazy C stuff!" he heard Jerry shouting.

Slade's face dropped. Clee himself gasped.

"Big Rowels is runnin' the Lazy C," Jerry rushed on. "The yearlin's he branded—"

"The Lazy C boys claim Jeb was on his way after me to have this feller arrested when he was shot," the sheriff cut in, eyeing the boy sharply. "They say Jeb left orders not to let him leave the ranch."

"I'm runnin' that ranch," Jerry flashed. "An' I never had no orders like them. Them punchers had better keep their yawps shut er they'll all be on the scout fer work. The yearlin's Big Rowels branded was part of some he had comin'. Why wouldn't he have a right to brand 'em?"

"Reckon he would if that's the way things lay," the sheriff muttered. "Anyhow, that's your business. If you don't want the charges pressed it's no skin off my shins." He faced Slade. "Scared I'll have to take you, Mitch."

"You ain't got nothin' on me only the

word of that damn drifter," Slade sneered. "You can't arrest a man without proof. That spur rowel don't mean nothin'."

"The fact that you're the only man on this range who shoots a rifle instead of a forty-five does!" Clee snapped. "Carter was killed with a rifle. An' I was creased with one."

"You can't prove I shoot a rifle," Slade challenged.

"You've got one there an' no forty-five," Clee retorted. "An' the first thing you grabbed fer when I accused you of murder was that rifle. If that ain't proof—"

"Moody's word will be," the sheriff interrupted dryly. "Moody spilled his guts. He's out there in the yard now with a bullet in his shoulder. I had to kick him a couple of jolts an' holler to make him understand. But he says that you an' him was in cahoots on all the rustlin' that's been done an' that you killed Carter 'cause you was scared he'd got wise to you!"

The remaining bullet in Clee's gun grooved Slade's desk as the cornered rancher seized up his rifle, only to drop it and cower back as the sheriff slipped a pair of handcuffs over his wrists and half-dragged him outside to where Moody, already handcuffed, slumped in his saddle.

Clee faced Jerry. "You've sure acted like a real pard today, sonny," he said soberly. "An' I'll try to make up fer it somehow."

"I'm the biggest liar in the world, that's what I am," the boy whispered. "But I lied fer a pard, Big Rowels, didn't I?"

"You bet you did, sonny, an' I reckon the good Lord'll overlook a lie like that. Anyhow, I'm goin' to make your word good. I'm comin' down to the Lazy C an' work fer them slicks I branded."

"You don't have to, Big Rowels," Jerry flashed. "You've got a job as foreman with my spread startin' right now. Fer as them slicks goes there's only one way you can ever pay fer 'em."

"How's that?" Clee asked.

"Have you fergot them spurs you promised me with big rowels like yours, already?" Jerry demanded. "You're a fine pard, you are!"

You'll Enjoy...

THE KILLER MOOSE

By Howard E. Morgan

Here is a Really Fine Animal Story By a Man Who Knows What He Is Writing About.

▼ ▼ ▼

In the Next Issue—On the Newsstands, February 6th.

Subscribe to ACE-HIGH MAGAZINE and Save Money!

THE ARMY AVALANCHE

By James W. Egan

A busted mitt and a right to the jaw would make some fighters kiss the canvas and stay there—but not Soldier Sampson. It takes a lot to keep an old army man down.

CRASH!

No, it wasn't the roof fallin' in. Just a coupla hundred pounds o' beef smearin' the canvas. Even before the referee's arm begun to swing I knowed this fist festival was over. Ike Dodge was colder'n a gallon o' sherbet. One more o' my heavyweight hopefuls had failed to make the grade.

The wash-up come in the third semester of a scheduled six-round main event of a Eagles' show in Tacoma. Charlie Rocco, a local favorite, whanged two hard rights to Dodge's lug and my big punk did the accordion act with speed and dispatch.

Me and two seconds dragged the carcass to the corner soon's the fatal "Ten!" was recorded. Ike Dodge did not entirely revive until we reached the dressin' room.

"What happened?" he mumbles.

"Oh, you been enjoyin' a nice li'l' snooze," I responds, bitter. "If you had a chin out in front instead o' a windshield mebbe slumber time would not come so quick to-night!"

"Windshield?" Ike chatters, dizzy-like.

"Uh-huh," I tells him. "Windshields is made o' glass, ain't they, umb-dumb? Well, I guess it's no use moanin' over spilled lemon extract. Rocco stopped you in your first real test. I wanted to see how you'd stack up with a guy who can both take and thump. I found out. Not that Rocco is so blisterin' hot, but I've a hunch he can lick you any time he gets you in a ring. The smartest thing you can do with that eggshell prow is go back to your job in the gravel pit."

A few minutes later I sent him packin' with his brother Hank, who'd been a towel waver, and ankled off by my lonesome for a cup o' coffee. I was parked in Dusty's Grill, inhalin' Java and feelin' cheery as a centipede with corns when a fat little man in a Salvation Army uniform entered the joint and paused at my table.

"Pardon me, Mr. Keenan," he says, "I'm Chaplain Durr, and I wondered if I might have a few words with you. I was at the boxin' match to-night and—"

"You a fight fan?" I'm a bit surprised. "Sure, sit down! Have somethin'?"

"No, thank you, Mr. Keenan." The chaplain gloms a chair. "I am a fan. Why not? Fact is, I usta direct sport activities at a Government institution.

Never miss a show in Tacoma. Too bad Dodge has no chin. He hits hard."

"He's just three wasted months!" I growls. "Another oversized flop. Every young heavy I've picked up for the last year's been the same. If they can sock, they can't catch. If they can catch, they can't bust a paper bag. I been huntin' a good big kid since Mike Malloy, who was a real comer, got crippled in that auto wreck down South. All I seem to do is lose my time and rubles."

"Good big men is scarce," Durr says. "However, I think I know where you can dig up a first-class heavyweight, Mr. Keenan."

"Don't tell me," I cracks, "that John L. Sullivan is buried in these parts!"

He grins good-natured.

"No, Mr. Keenan, this big boy's a live one. Name's Sampson—Sergeant Herb Sampson. He's attached to Company C, seven hundred and seventh Infantry, at Fort Lewis near here. Sergeant Sampson holds the post championship. And he's good!"

"A soldier, huh?" I shakes my head. "Far be it from me to knock our army, but I've seen darn few service ringsters who was able to fever my blood. Anyway, if this bird has stuff, how come some o' the local hustlers ain't signed him up?"

"Several have tried without success. I know Sampson rather well, and I've advised him not to tie himself up until he can dicker with a real pilot. You have a reputation, Mr. Keenan. You've managed Mike Malloy and other high class boys. And you won't make no mistake in givin' Sampson serious consideration. He's won nine battles in a row by the knockout route."

"Admittin' mebbe he's got somethin'," I says, "what good'll it do me? He's workin' for Uncle Sam, ain't he?"

"Sampson's up for discharge next week—that's one reason I was anxious to talk to you, Mr. Keenan. To-morrow night there's a smoker at the post. Herb's in the main event, meetin' Butch Roper of Seattle. Why not arrange to go out to Fort Lewis with me and look the boy over? I'm sure you won't regret the trip, Mr. Keenan."

"Well, Chaplain," I says after a moment or so, "I'll oblige. I ain't too optimistic, but seein' as how I'm gatin' Ike Dodge I guess the market's open for fresh meat. Besides, I ain't been around a barracks since me and a coupla million other biscuits draped in the old O. D. and handed the Kaiser cold chills. It'll be a treat!"

So the followin' evenin' found me and Chaplain Durr occupyin' ringside seats at the Fort Lewis clout carnival. We orbed seven sluggin' matches, in which the lads displayed earnestness if not much else, before the main bout was announced.

"There's Sampson, climbin' through the ropes," says my guide. "I think you'll like his style, Mr. Keenan."

The post champion was usin' a O. D. overcoat for a bathrobe. He slipped outa it after puttin' on the leather, and I got a good view o' him. He was a tall, well-built youngster with fine shoulders and strong legs. I judged he'd scale around one-ninety. His looks, I confess, impressed me favorable. He had the clean-cut air of a college kid.

"Butch" Roper, the sergeant's opponent, I knowed slightly. He was a veteran heavy from the Waterman stable in Seattle. Just a big, dumb palooka. He was a fair puncher, though, and could stand cuffin'. Not exactly a set-up for the soldier, I figured.

The bell clanged, and the big boys went to work. Work is right. There was no stallin' about Sampson. He tore into Roper, sockin' away with both mitts. The action was fast and furious, Butch throwin' his pads back vicious.

All around me and the chaplain soldiers jumped to their feet, yellin' for their hero. Though Sampson was absorbin' his share o' stiff jolts, he was damagin' Roper more. He hit with plenty power, particular' with the right duke. Several times I seen Butch's knees wobble.

O' course, the soldier was green. He swung too much and left a lotta openin's. Butch finally cracked him with a solid left hook to the chin. The blow rocked Sampson. Roper rushed in. The army brawler straightened, whipped a terrific right to the vet's lug. Butch toppled like he was struck by a shell.

Durin' the middle o' the count the gong clanged, savin' Roper. His handlers dragged him to his stool and snapped him outa it, usin' smellin' salts freely. He'd been hurt bad, but he was a tough egg.

At the beginnin' o' the second Butch shuffled forth sorta tottery. I'd a hunch he was fakin', and a few moments later I knowed he was. Sampson bounded across the canvas, eager to finish his man—and run plump into a wicked haymaker.

The smash sprawled the soldier for nine counts. It would've erased some fighters from the fracas, that punch. Fighters like Ike Dodge, for instance. Yet Sampson pulled himself together and gamely arose to face a storm o' leather.

Three times in the second canto the sergeant was dumped on the rosin. Each time he got up, full o' fight. He had guts, and he could take it. Not only did he weather the round, but he had Roper on his knees from a left swing at the bell.

"Lots o' heart, Chaplain," I mutters. "And there ain't no peanut brittle in his chin. Train him into real condition, teach him how to shoot a wallop and time it proper and he—"

The gong for the third chapter cut me off. Willin' as ever, Sampson hopped from his stool. He waded into Butch, whose willin'ness hardly matched his. Despite the second round maulin', the soldier seemed the stronger o' the pair.

They traded hard slams in the center o' the ring. Suddenly Sampson hooked a left to the belly. Butch winced. While he still was feelin' that poke in the pantry, the sergeant chopped a short right to the chin.

Roper slumped to the canvas, phiz forward. He shuddered once, then lay quiet. Butch was iffstay, finished for the night.

"Ten straight knockouts for Herb." Chaplain Durr warbles, amid the joyous whoops o' the surroundin' warriors. "Is he a prospect?"

"No butterscotch!" I agrees. "And he's made me a prospector!"

We didn't get to see Sampson until he was dressed. Eventual, Durr and me got him loose from all his O. D. admirers, with the single exception of a short, kinda homely young fellow wearin' a corporal's chevrons. This soldier had seconded him.

The chaplain introduced me as Andy Keenan, former handler o' Mike Malloy. Sampson shook hands cordial and I lost no time gettin' down to business. The big boy listened polite, but not too enthused. He glanced at the runty corporal.

"I don't know," he says. "I been thinkin' some o' reenlistin' when my time's up next week. The army feeds and clothes me, and I draw a sergeant's pay. What if I flivvered in the ring?"

Durr started to reply, but I didn't need him to argue for me. I was kinda keen on this strappin' soldier. I poured the old oil. Sampson continued to act dubious. I tackled a patriotic angle.

"You're in the army, ready to fight for your country. Suppose some day you had a chance to fight for America and bring back the heavyweight crown? The present champ is a foreigner, and so is many leadin' contenders for the title. Italy and South America is ambitious to grab it from Germany. We must develop better heavies here in the U. S. A. Your country needs you, soldier!"

My spiel registers with Sampson.

"Yeah, that title belongs on this side o' the pond," says he. "Still, I dunno. What you think, Luke?"

The sawed-off corporal scratched his nose, which had a slight twist in it.

"You decide for yourself, Sarge.

Don't let me stand in your way. You might's well take a shot at the big dough."

"I've never fought without you in my corner, Luke," chirps the sergeant. "Listen, Mr. Keenan. Luke and me's buddies. Where he goes I go, and where I go he goes. I'm out next week, but he has nine months left to serve. If you'll buy Luke outa the army so he can come along with me I'll tie up with you. Otherwise, nothin' doin'!"

"Well," I mutters, seein' Sampson was dead in earnest, "mebbe it can be arranged. Only, remember this: you're gonna have just one manager, and I'm that baby. You understand?"

"Don't worry; Luke won't give you no trouble, Mr. Keenan." The sergeant throws a fond arm around the runt. "We're buddies, that's all. You'll like Luke. Wait until you hear him blow a harmonica or thump a guitar! There ain't a better player in the army!"

"Huh!" I says, doubtin' I'd go ga-ga over this undersized corporal if he could play every instrument in Whiteman's band. Even then I was experiencin' misgivin's. However, I couldn't do no business with Herb Sampson unless I included his buddy, and I wanted the sluggin' sergeant.

A WEEK later Sampson was outa the army. Likewise Corporal Luke Baggs, with his harmonica and guitar. The latter, o' course, at my expense. Six weeks later the soldier brawled his first main event in Tacoma, plasterin' the garlic outa Charlie Rocco for four rounds and sinkin' him to slumber in the fifth. Yeah, the same Rocco who'd folded Ike Dodge. In case you're curious about Ike, he was back haulin' sand and gravel—where he belonged.

A couple more wins in the Pacific Northwest and I invaded California with "Soldier" Sampson, as I'd tagged him. I knowed I had a comer in the twenty-three-year-old heavyweight. He was game and tough, learned fast and could hit. How he could sock-socko! His fists was as full o' dynamite as Bobby Jones is o' golf victories.

Don't think I wasn't grateful to Chaplain Durr, either. I wrote him regular and never passed a Salvation Army kettle without skinnin' the roll.

Within twelve months o' the time he'd left the infantry my big kid was bein' boosted to the skies by boxin' writers. He had a string o' kayoes long's a giraffe's neck when we invaded New York for a twelve-round shot with "Tuffy" Brennan, another youngster with championship yearnin's. The winner o' the bout was quite apt to grab a outdoor "gigantic" with the title-holder.

Me and Soldier Sampson got along great. He was a hardworkin', clean livin' lad, always willin' to listen to good advice. Except on one subject. That was the subject o' Corporal Baggs.

It hadn't took me long to get fed up with Sampson's buddy. Not that the runt tried to knock my trainin' methods or anythin' like that. And I could stand for his mouth organ and guitar playin', although I growed very weary o' hearin' him strum the latter and chant his favorite ballad, "The Prisoner's Song." He sure wore the jail-house refrain into fragments.

My main objection to Baggs, however, was his failin' for frails. Especially red-headed mammas. A strawberry mop always set him off. And for all his ugly pan and twisted beak he managed to get across with the femmes.

The worst of it was that the shrimp didn't have a lick o' brains where a woman was concerned. He'd fall into a jam, and Herb Sampson would dig him out. My fighter left dames be himself; mebbe because he did so much second-hand worryin' over 'em account o' his buddy. I squawked in vain.

"Why do you put up with it, Herb?" I demands. "If he ain't sense enough to leave gazelles alone let him suffer!"

"Oh, I couldn't do that, Andy! I can't throw down a pal. Anyhow, he's younger'n me, you know."

"Younger? There's three months' difference in your ages! You'd be better off to give the little wart the bounce, no salami!"

"He's my buddy," insists Sampson, stubborn. "I've never battled without Luke in my corner, and I never expect to, Andy!"

So Baggs kept pursuin' the pink-haired pippins, and his scrapes must have cost Sampson plenty nickels and several gray hairs. I could do nothin' about it except cuss, and finally I growed tired o' that.

Shortly after my scrapper settled down to trainin' for the Brennan brawl the holder o' the heavy title risked his laurels in Madison Square Garden against a burly Brazilian, Vittorio Vasquez. The South American wasn't considered terrible dangerous, although his backers boasted he could punch like Luis Firpo.

Havin' high hopes o' forcin' the Teuton into a fight some day, me and Herb decided to orb him in action. We was among the thousands o' amazed spectators who seen Vasquez survive four knockdowns in the early rounds and batter out a victory in the eighth, climaxin' the gruellin' encounter with a right to the inchay that meant a world's championship.

"Well," I remarks, grim, "the crown has passed into American hands again—only it's the wrong kinda American. This big Spic's better'n Firpo. He hits as hard and he can box some, besides bein' a glutton for punishment. Takin' him'll be a chore for our heavies."

One month later Soldier Sampson faced Tuffy Brennan in the same arena. It was a slashin' mill while it lasted. Tuffy was fairly smart and had a wicked right. He floored my boy in the first and again in the second. Thereafter he was busy fendin' off the terrific thrusts o' the "Army Avalanche," as one newspaperman dubbed Herb. Tough as was Tuffy, he couldn't stand up to the soldier. Two smashin' rights in the fourth spelled his doom. He reeled up from the first sock, but the second laid him in the Arctic zone.

Followin' our triumph, I hurled a challenge at the new champ. The Brazilian's handlers sidestepped us for a coupla months. They was shrewd bozos, o' course. All the while the papers was smokin' things up. A bout between Soldier Sampson and Vasquez was the natural o' naturals. My youngster was called the hope o' the United States. His fightin' heart, his punchin' prowess and his modest manner had made him plenty popular. Nor did the old army background lessen his appeal to the fans. Experts predicted him and the South American would gate over a million bucks. New York, Chicago and Philadelphia all craved to stage this fistic "gigantic."

Chicago promoters eventually landed the coveted shot. Vittorio Vasquez was pledged a truckload o' pesos to meet Sampson in fifteen rounds at Soldiers' Field on a date in September. The champ was gloomin' the big oughday; however, the end guaranteed us would buy quite a few platters o' breaded veal cutlets.

The first o' August I marched my heavy up to a trainin' camp in the Michigan woods, where he could secure the right food and exercise, as well's freedom from pests—if you don't list Luke Baggs among the latter, which I was inclined to do.

Around camp the runt wasn't such a dose o' lysol. He kept our crew merry with his harmonica. He never went anywhere without it. One or two o' the gang even liked his guitarin', but I had to stuff my ears whenever I heard the doleful strains o' "The Prisoner's Song."

Trouble was, the little corporal did not stay in camp all the time. Every weekend he'd put his mouth organ and a roll o' wrinkles borrowed from Herb in his pocket and depart for Chi. To visit some fluff, naturally. On Monday morns he'd show up dull-eyed and broke, whereupon Sampson would heave sighs o' relief. I tried to get

Herb to stop loanin' Baggs money for his trips if it fretted him, but only wasted sufficient breath to fill a Zeppelin.

No doubt fortunately for the big boy's peace o' mind, Luke Baggs always returned whole and unharmed from his Windy City forays. Our final week in the woods arrived. Soldier Sampson, brown and hard as leather, never looked more fit. I decided to take him to Chi for the twenty-four hours precedin' the scuffle.

The day we broke camp I was gabbin' with Wally Brown, a scribe from the stockyards village. Baggs squatted in front o' the head shack, jazzin' the newest foxtrot on his harmonica.

"Quite a player, that half-pint," comments Brown. "Also quite a player around. Last Saturday night I lamped him sheikin' it very forte in a Loop cabaret with 'Babe' Tully. Know her, Andy?"

"No," I growls, "but I'll bet a yard o' mint leaves to a used tennis ball she's a carrot thatch!"

"Yeah, she's red-headed, and a nifty number, Andy. I'd consider her a kinda dangerous playmate for Baggs. She's supposed to be the moll o' 'Scar' Matilla, the gangster. Matilla's been knowed to put guys on the spot for less."

"A gangster's moll?" This hands me a unpleasant jolt. "Why, the doggoned apsay! Not a word to Herb, Wally! I don't want to give him no cause for worry on the eve o' the brawl. I'll fix Mr. Baggs!"

I was all of a foam, no triflin'! I realized what it would do to Soldier Sampson if a gangster's rod spanked his buddy. He'd go utsnay, and there would prob'ly be no title fight.

All the way into Chicago I stewed inwardly. Once arrived, I herded my small party to a selected hotel. I got Baggs alone.

"Listen, cutie chaser!" I tells him, harsh. "Nobody leaves this drum tonight without permission! Nobody, understand?"

"Aw, have a heart, Andy!" the runt squawks. "I got a date at seven I can't break. I'll be back in a coupla hours!"

"Your date's fractured right now!" I yodels. "Don't try and slip away, or you'll never work Herb's corner tomorrow. I ain't lettin' no shrimp like you gum the works!"

"Aw right!" a bit sullen. "I'll stick around. Mebbe I can call Babe and postpone our date."

"You forget Babe the next twenty-four hours," I says. "Mebbe you'd do well to forget her the rest o' your life!"

He looked sour, but seen I meant business. The remainder o' the afternoon he loafed in the lobby, and even started flirtin' with a cigar counter lily. He would do somethin' like that.

A little past six o'clock we put on the feed bag in the hotel dinin' room—Herb, Baggs, Chief Trainer Jock Bruce and me. Just as the noodle soup was served I was called to the phone by Pat Holland, one o' the promoters. I had to desert the dinin' hall for a lobby booth. Holland kept me five minutes, at least. When I got back I found my noodles chillin'—and Luke Baggs not to be glimmed any place.

"Where's the runt?" I demands, suspicious.

"He ducked out, Andy," answers Sampson, half-grinnin'. "He insisted he had a terrible important matter to attend to and he was afraid you mightn't let him, so he skipped the back way. Promised he'd be in by nine o'clock, though."

"The little rat!" I storms. "Afraid I wouldn't let him go, huh? Why, I give him strict orders not to leave the hotel! Heaven help him if he ain't back by nine!"

Baggs failed to appear at that hour. Ten o'clock chimed, findin' him as yet a. w. o. l. Herb Sampson was anxious.

"He told me he'd be here, Andy. Suppose somethin' has happened to him? He's about due to get jammed up again."

"Oh, he's prob'ly lingerin' with his

sweetie." Recallin' what Wally Brown had spilled, I was plenty worried but daren't show it. "Come on; time for you to hit the hay!"

"I'll wait a few minutes more, Andy," my fighter persists. "Wish I knowed where Luke had gone, darn him!"

The hands o' the clock over the desk crept toward eleven. The lobby was almost empty. Sampson fidgeted in a leather chair. All at once he come to his feet. A femme in a fur coat ankled into the hotel on the run. She was red-haired and appeared deeply excited. Straight at the big boy she rushed.

"You're Soldier Sampson—I've seen pictures o' you!" she gasps out. "You must save Luke! He's in trouble, and it's my fault. To-night we was havin' dinner at a place across the river when Scar Matilla and four o' his mob walked in on us. I usta go with Scar and I guess he's sore because he got the air. He forced me and Luke to ride to a speakeasy on the south side where the Matilla mob hangs out. I tricked the bunch and escaped, but Scar's still holdin' Luke a prisoner. And I'm afraid o' what he intends to do!"

"A prisoner, huh?" I cracks. "Too bad he ain't got his guitar. Then he could warble 'The Prisoner's Song' with real feelin'."

"Andy, this is serious!" Herb snaps. "You say Matilla is a gangster? Where's this speakeasy? Can you take me there?"

"Listen, kid!" I squawks, alarmed. "It's a matter for the bulls, not you. Remember to-morrow's fight! Mebbe this is part of a trap set by gamblers. I don't trust the dame. She's Babe Tully, Matilla's moll!

"I'm done with Scar, and that's on the level!" flashes the femme. "I'd been locked up, too, if I hadn't slipped through the women's washroom to the alley and found a cab. Yes, I'll guide you, Soldier!"

"Ixnay!" I barks. "Baggs brought it on himself. You can't risk your life with the championship at stake! You owe the public—"

"Hang the public! Luke's my buddy!" Sampson blazes. "Bout or no bout, I ain't lettin' gangsters bump him. You a taxi, miss?"

"Outside — waitin'!" responds the redhead.

Before I could stop 'em Herb grabbed Babe Tully by the arm and the pair galloped outa the lobby. I heard a cab door slam. Cussin' a sky-blue streak, I dashed for a phone and called the nearest police station. Then I routed out Jock Bruce and prayed the bulls would show speed.

The John Laws did. Don't tell me you can't get action outa the coppers in Chi—in some cases, at least. Mebbe it was due to the fact America's challenger for the world's title was in peril; but, anyway, in less than twenty minutes half a dozen bluecoats led by a husky lieutenant reached the hotel.

Jock and me piled into two police cars. With sirens screamin', we headed for the alleged hangout o' Scar Matilla's mob. We burned rubber coverin' them long city blocks, no canned spinach! Yet we was almost twenty minutes behind Soldier Sampson—and a lot can happen in twenty minutes. I was all in a lather.

Yeah, a lot can happen in twenty minutes. And when we arrived at the speakeasy, we wasn't long learnin' a lot had!

The bulls busted into the joint with rods ready, Jock and me at their heels. Nobody attempted to bar our way in the ground floor drink bazaar. The few patrons scurried for cover. Somewhere above we could hear a fearful racket.

It didn't take no time to bound up a flight o' stairs and locate the scene o' the riot. And riot is right! What a spectacle greeted us on crashin' that locked room on the second floor, evidently a private gatherin' place for the Matilla mob! I'll never forget it!

The room was a total wreck. Furniture was busted and scattered in every direction. Three tough bozos was

sprawled on the floor. Two was cold; the third holdin' a broken jaw and groanin'. Over in a far corner Babe Tully knelt by Luke Baggs, who was sittin' with back to the wall, bleedin' copious and practically out.

In the center o' the room Soldier Sampson battled with two burly gangsters. One was a dark gazook with a scarred cheek. Like a young giant Herb stood there, stavin' off the attackin' pair, drivin' into both with bare fists. Even as we crossed the threshold, he lashed a right into Matilla's disfigured pan. Scar tumbled backwards. Gore gushed in a stream from a busted nose.

A powerful left knocked the other gangster reelin' toward us. The police lieutenant's clubbed gat come down on his conk, and that baby was all washed up.

"My God!" exclaims the leader o' the bulls, a minute later. "Did you clean up this mob single-handed? And you unarmed? No wonder they call you the Army Avalanche!"

"I was mad," pants Herb. "I managed to get in here with Miss Tully and found Matilla with four cronies. I demanded they turn loose Luke. They wouldn't, so I started somethin'. Luke tried to help, but he ain't no fighter. They locked the door and ganged on me, but I knowed I could lick a roomful o' such rats!"

"It seems you was right," says the lieut. "What a awful chance you took, though, Soldier! Tacklin' five gangsters without a gun! I can't understand why Scar or somebody didn't pull a heat on you!"

"I didn't give 'em much opportunity. Anyhow, I figured most gangsters is yellow at heart. They ain't shootin' nobody face to face, in front o' witnesses. Matilla had to think twice about bumpin' a guy as well-known as me off. While he thought, I acted!"

"Well, I still maintain you're a prize chump!" I yammers. "You, with a title shot to-morrow! Come outa this muss all okay?"

"I'd noted his pan was cut and bruised a bit from gangster blows. However, his eyes wasn't damaged. Then, suddenly, my lamps fell on his right duke. It was swelled up.

"Afraid I hurt the paw, Andy," he confesses as I grab it.

"Let's get outa this dive and find a doc!" I snaps. "The police can handle Matilla and his rats from now on."

THE medico who examined the mitt confirmed my worst fears. Soldier Sampson had broken a bone in the right hand.

"The fight's off!" I rages. "You can't meet Vasquez to-morrow. All account o' Baggs and his baggage. This little stunt erases him. I don't want to ever see him or a red-headed dame around again!"

"The fight ain't off, Andy!" The soldier's jaw sets. "We'll dope the paw before the bout to deaden the pain. I'll save the right all I can—mebbe my left'll stop Vasquez. I punch as hard with it. And Luke Baggs will be in my corner. What I did for him tonight he may do for me some day, in some way. We're still buddies, Andy!"

"Yeah, a fat lot he could do for you!" I squawks.

But all my objections was vain. Herb Sampson sure set plenty store by that troublesome runt. Even after a escapade which might ruin his chance to win the world's heavyweight championship.

The mornin' papers got hold o' that speakeasy clean-up. What the police lieutenant had to spout made a great hero outa Soldier Sampson. O' course, the fact Herb also had suffered a injury to his hand leaked out. I was unable to keep it altogether dark. When the worried promoters sped to our hotel, we discounted the seriousness o' the hurt and assured 'em the brawl would go on as carded.

You prob'ly know Soldiers' Field was packed with fans the afternoon o' the Sampson-Vasquez battle, that it drawed about the biggest gate in ring

history. The weather was cool and perfect, and every boxin' bug who could buy or bum his way to Chicago was there.

On enterin' the ring Herb received a welcome that rent the heavens, a ovation the old Manassa Mauler would've envied. What he'd done to Scar Matilla and his mob made o' him a idol almost beyond history. Well I knowed, though, that idols is afflicted with clay feet. Cheers would turn to jeers if my heavy lost to Vasquez.

Owin' to that crippled right, prospects o' victory didn't loom bright. However, the busted fin was doped to the limit and Soldier Sampson was the kinda boy who'd give all he got, no matter what the handicap. Not everybody in the crowd believed the yarn o' the injury on the square; some wise guys figured it a "bear story" concocted to befuddle the Brazilian.

Because Herb had so ordered, Luke Baggs was in our corner as a second. He was wearin' the O. D. duds he always donned for a fight. The runt had a subdued air, and well he might.

Vittorio Vasquez invaded the arena last. Champion as he was, he failed to get a welcome to compare with Sampson's. The burly, swarthy South American settled on his stool, scowlin' through his black whiskers.

"Go after him hard," I tells Herb right before the gong. "With your bum mitt, you gotta get him in a hurry!"

What a first round them thousands and thousands o' customers glimmed! Soldier Sampson come out like a whirlwind. His openin' punch, a savage left to the jaw, knocked Vasquez into the ropes. From then on the scmester was nothin' but give and take. More action was packed into them three minutes than most brawls offer in fifteen rounds. How them big huskies stood and slugged, toe to toe! Both kissed canvas durin' the ragin' mêlée. A solid left downed Vittorio. The Brazilian's mighty right floored Soldier Sampson for a short count. The crowd was hoarse and crazy at the bell, no horseradish!

In the second canto both men took up where they'd left off. Nobody could stand this terrific pace very long. Someone must drop and stay dropped. I commenced to have a gnawin' fear it might be Herb. He was tough, yet the Brazilian seemed equally tough. And Vasquez had two mitts filled with dynamite, Sampson only one. He was doin' noble with his murderous left; but I had a hunch it would require two good hands to beat Vittorio.

The latter begun to savvy the soldier was sparin' his right. He'd acted in the initial round as if not quite sure the rumors of injury wasn't hooey. Now he gained confidence. He lunged in with all he had—and the Brazilian had plenty! Finally, with less than a minute to go, he crashed over a stunnin' right. Herb fell. He struggled to his knee, took the full count. He got up, sadly weak.

Another joltin' right to the jaw. My fighter flopped again, face forward. When they go that way, they're usually out cold. Herb didn't move as the referee started the toll. Vasquez hoofed it to a neutral corner, his black pan split in a happy grin.

The roars o' the excited crowd abruptly died away. A hush come on the vast multitude, as if fans sensed the impendin' tragedy, the death blow to patriotic hopes. Not one fighter in a hundred survives a sock like Soldier Sampson was blasted with.

I hear someone babbling alongside me. It's Luke Baggs.

"Get up, Herb! Get up!" he screams. He whirls on me. "Can't you do somethin', Andy?"

"Yeah!" I snarls, half outa my head. "It's your fault he's layin' there, shrimp! And you're his buddy, ain't you? Suppose you do somethin' for him!"

O' course, I was only soundin' off. There was nothin' on earth that I knowed of that Baggs or anybody could do. But, at my bitter words, the

little corporal seemed to go goofy. The referee's arm was pendulumin', slow and measured. Baggs' hand flew to the pocket o' his olive drab shirt. He jerked out, of all things, his harmonica!

I figured the runt was completely nuts. The mouth organ leaped to his lips and he played like a man possessed. In a twinklin' I recognized the music—a tune familiar to every fightin' American.

It was "The Star Spangled Banner!"

And how Luke Baggs was playin' its inspirin' refrain! Loudly and feverishly, with the full power o' his lungs. Ringsiders begun to jump from their seats, cheerin'. The crazy corporal kept blowin'.

"Seven! Eight!" I could barely catch the referee's count.

"Andy! Look!" Jock Bruce hisses.

Believe it or not, Soldier Sampson was stirrin'. He lifted. Through some miracle he come outa the shadows of oblivion, staggered to his feet in the very nick o' time. There wasn't a split second between him and defeat!

No, I won't say Baggs' wild playin' o' the National Anthem was responsible. Nor yet will I say it was not. All I know is a unbelievable thing took place. After bein' apparently stiff as a West Pointer's back, Soldier Sampson suddenly revived and *got up!*

He was in a terrible bad way, naturally. Vasquez tore across the ring, swingin'. The dazed soldier, actin' by sheer instinct, grabbed at him and fell into a clinch. Before the men could be broke the bell rang, endin' the round.

The racket which went up made a beggar outa the well-known description — and a ragged beggar, at that! However, I was too busy to heed the din, too busy with smellin' salts and directin' seconds workin' frantic over Herb.

That short, short minute o' rest was over quick. Yet we'd cleared a lotta fog away. Soldier Sampson's superb condition aided in his recovery. He was in fair shape for the third round.

Vasquez bounded from his stool, throwin' leather with both mitts, determined to crush the renewed hopes o' the U. S. A. Herb, still guided largely by his fighter's instinct, moved around. He made Vittorio miss many punches, clipped home several lefts.

The Brazilian kept borin' in. He finally landed a solid right to the side o' Sampson's jaw. The soldier swayed. Vittorio closed in on him, intent on makin' the kill. So eager was he that he left the sweetest kinda mark for a good right-hand sock. But Herb had no right to-night.

Hadn't he, though? All at once my gogglin' glims seen his crippled duke shoot hard for the chin. Sampson connected flush. And what a right smack that was!

The Brazilian's knees buckled. His guard dropped. Herb laced his lug with a left and drove another right for the point. Vittorio's bulk hit the canvas with a resoundin' thud. No baked apples, he was colder than his native land will ever get!

"—Nine. Ten!" barks the ref. The arm of a new world's champion is raised.

Then the panic was on! Reporters, radio announcers and fans started for the ring. Herb was tryin' to help the unlucky South American to his corner. Luke Baggs scrambled through the ropes. His harmonica flashed out. He begun to breathe forth "The Stars and Stripes Forever."

Just a few bars and the crowd swarmed on us. Soldier Sampson was elevated to happy shoulders. Even his buddy, Jock Bruce and me got hoisted. Never have I been in such a crush. Coppers finally had to use the hickory to rescue us from the public.

It musta been a hour before we was safe in the dressin' room, with the world locked out. Jock and me stripped the gloves from the pale and wearied Herb. He was catchin' merry hell from his swollen right hand now, and who can wonder at that?"

"You won't be able to defend your title for months," I tells him. "You've almost ruined the mitt!"

"There was no other way I could win, Andy." Herb grits his teeth. "Vasquez is a real fighter. He nearly finished me in the second. I know everythin' went black Then, suddenly, I seemed to hear music. I don't know where it come from. Somethin' was urgin' me to get up, get up, get up! It wouldn't let me stay down. Funny what a guy'll imagine when he's—"

"Imagine?" cuts in Luke Baggs. "Why, you did hear music, Sarge! It was me, playin' 'The Star Spangled Banner.' I had a crazy hunch when I seen you layin' there. I figured no man who's been in the army would fail to come to his feet if he heard the national air!"

"Huh?" Herb demands. "You played 'The Star Spangled Banner' for me?" His pain-drawn face brightens. "There you are, Andy! I knowed my buddy would come through when I needed him!"

"And I got somethin' more to tell you, now the fight's over," Baggs hurries on. "I'm done with dames, champ. Even with Babe, though she was a good scout last night. I ain't draggin' you into no more trouble." The runt looks at me. "I mean, it, Andy. Next time I see a red-headed woman, no matter if she's got Clara Bow cheated, I'm gonna run like blazes!"

"Yeah," I squawks, "you prob'ly will —in her direction!"

Action! Gun Smoke! Thrills! Romance!

All of These, and More, in

WARRIORS OF THE PECOS

A Book-length Western Novel

By W. D. HOFFMAN

The Yarn of a Fighting Ranger Who Was Sent on a Man-hunt for His Own Brother—and Accomplished His Mission.

This and Other Equally Outstanding Stories Will Be Found in the First March Issue.

Order Your Copy Now—Get It February 6th.

Tell the World ACE-HIGH MAGAZINE Is the Best!

GAMBLIN' WITH DEATH

By

Stephen Payne

A range kid ties up with a hombre who's perhaps a trifle too hard for him. But even though the kid finds himself in law-trouble, he's ready to ride the mill-tails of hell for his pal. And maybe he's rewarded? Read ahead and see.

THE waddies on the Three Open A payroll don't think near as much of Dice Kelly as I do. But Dice risked his own neck to drag me out of a river jus' the second day after I'd joined the outfit. Me and my bronc parted company in mid-stream, where, weighed down with Angora chaps, I had never a chance of gettin' out, when Kelly swam his hoss after me, roped me, yanked me up to his mount, loaded me on and somehow got us all to shore.

He's a big, noisy, bull-necked, deep-voiced hombre with an iron jaw and scant crop of red hair, this Dice Kelly, a cowhand as asks no odds nor favors from the best of 'em. But he'd just as well be nicknamed Poker or Black Jack or Roulette, as Dice, for he bucks every gambling game there is, regardless, and consequent' ain't got a dollar to his name. But that don't hurt his stock none with me. I admire him.

Kelly's a cowpuncher from the word go, I tell the rannies, and they admit he is. Nerve? No one ever has seen him show fear of ornery broncs or anything else. "A reckless, gamblin', drinkin' fool," is what more'n one waddie calls him.

That's all jake with me. I'd like to be called "a reckless, gamblin', drinkin' fool," too. But naturally I ain't reckless; I'm timid. You see, I'm just a kid what doesn't even need to shave. Gamblin' don't charm me and even one glass of red likker is one too many.

Foreman Hank Lee sez to me one day, "Matty, quit copyin' Kelly and act natural."

"You go to thunder!" I come back, for I think that's the way Kelly would talk if he was bawled out.

"I've a hell of a notion to turn you over my knee and paddle you," says the foreman.

We're out on the calf round-up at the time, and just me, the foreman and the cook near the mess wagon, when here, drivin' a buckboard, comes the boss hisself from the home ranch.

"Hank," he calls, "I want a couple of cowboys to ride down to Three Feathers and bring back a bunch of steers I've bought from the J Bar J outfit."

"Dice Kelly can be one of them," foreman Hank comes back, glancin' at me. If I can guess what's in his mind he's thinkin', "Kid, here's where we get Kelly away so you can't be copyin' him all the time."

"O. K." sez the boss. "Who'll we send with him, Hank?"

Afore Hank can reply I step right up to the buckboard and blurt, "Aw, Mr. Vail, please send me."

"Kid," snaps Hank, "anybody ask you to horn in here?"

"I'll quit your old outfit cold if I don't get to ride with Kelly," I come back, sassy.

For some reason S. A. Vail lets out a laugh. "All right, kid," he says. "From the way you and Hank glare at each other I guess he'll be glad to get rid of you too."

The foreman shrugs his shoulders. "I hate to see a kid get off on the wrong foot," is all he says.

Few minutes later I've loped out to the herd and brought Dice Kelly to camp. The boss hands Kelly a wallet, sayin', "Here's eight thousand dollars to pay for the steers you boys are to get from Johnnie Nash at the J Bar J, a few miles south of Three Feathers. Johnnie'll give you the steers I saw and agreed to take. Here's an additional hundred dollars for expenses, Kelly. Guess that's all."

Dice nods and pockets all the money. S. R. Vail looks at me. "Kid, I don't know much about you. Hope you make Kelly a first-class hand and keep up your end. He's boss, you understand. It's a hundred and fifty miles from the home ranch to Three Feathers. I'm expecting those steers at my ranch twelve days from today. Let me give you some advice, kid." His voice is awful serious. "A cowpuncher always gets what he goes after! Remember that."

"Yes, sir," sez I grateful. "Ho, Dice, what you want me to do first?"

It's plenty. I'm to roll a bed, get grub and some cooking utensils from the mess wagon, and pack the horse Dice'll bring outa the cavvy. As I've never packed a horse, I make an awful botch of the job and Kelly bawls me out terrible.

Foreman Hank hears this rough talk I'm gettin' and I hear him say to the big boss: "Reckon after all it's a good thing the yearlin' is goin' 'long with Kelly. He'll get his eyes opened. By the way, Mr. Vail, Dice is a terrible hand to drink and gamble. I'm a little leary 'bout that eight thousand bucks."

I don't hear the High Man's reply, but I click my teeth shut. Hank Lee needn't be "leary" about that cash. *I'm* on the job!

Me and Dice get started and jog along in silence for ten miles, south across the broken rangeland. Finally Kelly grins. It ain't a pretty grin, for he ain't a pretty hombre. Physique of a prize fighter, big square jaw, kinder flattened nose, face sun-burned till it's red as fire.

"Flip you quarters to see which one of us buys the first round of drinks when we hit Three Feathers," he suggests.

"Dice, I ain't got a quarter. I ain't got even a cent. 'Sides, Dice, would it be good sense to buy even one drink when you got all that dinero on you?"

"Oh, my gosh!" he roars. "You're a hell of a pard on the trail, you are. I'll drink all I please, whenever I please. Get that, kid."

"Shore it'll be all right," I agree, quick. "And I'll drink just as much as you do."

"That-a-boy!"

When we pitch camp that night Kelly shows me how to make fry-pan bread, and in the morning he's patient with my fumbles as we pack the horse, showin' me how it should be done. As we ride along this day I learn a lot from Kelly 'bout how to handle cattle, both on the trail and on the round-up. He tells me things about ridin' and ropin' that open my eyes. By afternoon of the third day, when we ride into Three Feathers and tie all our seven horses to a hitch-rail, I'm more than ever sold on the notion that he's the greatest cowman that ever lived.

Trailin' Kelly, I step into the War Bonnet Saloon and follow him right up to the bar. First swaller of the liquor gags me, and I feel pretty bad 'cause I can't down it like Dice does. He tosses off three drinks to my one small one, then looks around to see who's present. Besides the bartender the only folks there are two gents playin' stud poker.

"Come, have a drink," Kelly hollers, and they come, pronto. Dice buys; then one of the strangers; then the other stranger. 'Thout bein' noticed, I've ditched my drinks. I was going to drink just as much as Dice, but I find out I can't do it.

Kelly introduces hisself and me to the bartender and the two strangers. But he don't say where we're from nor where we're going, nor he don't mention our business. The looks of them strangers, whose names are Pennock and Hempel, I don't like—pasty-faced, slinky-eyed. "Tinhorns," I figgers to myself.

Any kind of gamblin' is a magnet to Dice and he's more'n agreeable when Hempel proposes a little stud. I sit and watch the game. Kelly keeps right on drinkin'. He has dug up the cash S. R. Vail gave him for our expenses, and as the afternoon wears on, what's left of that gets lower and lower.

When I can't stand it no longer I mosey over close to my pard and whisper, "The horses are still out there in the street. Hadn't we better go?"

"Go where?" he growls. "You go stable them nags and don't pester me no more."

"But—"

"Don't yuh 'but' me. Get out!"

The booze is workin' on him. He's got past the friendly, songful stage to where he is cross, ornery, quarrelsome. Nothin' for me to do but go and stable our ponies and unpack the pack hoss. When I return to the War Bonnet I gasp. While I was gone Kelly has pulled out that wallet of S. R. Vail's! The stud game's hot and heavy now, an' Kelly's so drunk he don't realize what he's doing.

I think of foreman Hank's words, and am mad as a hornet because now I know Hank spoke the truth. There sets Kelly, slouchin' over the card table, a quart bottle of whiskey at his elbow, his shirt unbuttoned at the throat, his face on fire, his eyes bleary and bloodshot. There he sets, gamblin' recklesser than ever he rode, gamblin' away money what doesn't belong to him!

It ain't no pretty thing to watch and I'm sweatin' blood. But what can I do? The tinhorns, sober, cool, clever, are fleecin' Dice Kelly. No limit on that game now. The bets are high. Pennock and Hempel winnin', winnin'. I has a wild hope that maybe Kelly can win back all he lost and more, but when I look close at them two tinhorns I know he never will. They're whipsawin' him between 'em. Crooks shore as shootin', but I can't prove it. Hempel manages to deal hisself an ace in the hole every time he gets the deal! Then he gives hisself two small cards in sight, while he hands Kelly a pair of tens or of kings, fixin' that poor drunk sucker so he'll bet his head off. On the fourth card round Hempel drops hisself another ace. As the fifth card falls he'll deal hisself one more, so he'll have two in sight and one in the hole.

Kelly, with three tens or three kings in sight against a pair of aces in sight, will bet 'em high—and lose, course, for Hempel will turn over his hole card

ace. Three aces! Sick and mad I watch this same thing happen four times runnin'. I think wild 'bout goin' and gettin' the sheriff to stop the game. But is it any of his business? And would he stop it if he knew?

The night wears on. Dice calls for another full bottle of whiskey, and drinkin' from the bottle, long and deep, counts his money—all big bills what are left now. "Four thousand smackers," he says thick. "And my deal."

He shuffles the cards and flips 'em round to each player, one face down, one face up. "Huh, I got a jack in sight. It's high. Bet you a thousand dollars."

But since it's Kelly who's dealin' this time both Hempel and Pennock are scairt to call his bet, though Kelly taunts 'em, callin' 'em pikers and cheapskates. Pennock gets the deal, and again Kelly offers a cool thousand-dollar bet on the second card—a king. This time it's called. One after another Pennock deals four kings to Kelly, who has a deuce in the hole. As the last card falls, Kelly, seeming to think his four kings can't be beat, shoves out the last of his money.

Pennock had already throwed up his hand, leaving Hempel to stay and call each bet. With the five, six, eight and nine of clubs in sight, Hempel says cool, "Got any more money, cowboy? If not I'll call that last thousand."

"More money? Hell, no!" snorts Kelly. "I'll have a plenty, though, when yuh show your hole card."

Hempel shows it. The seven of clubs! "Can you beat a straight flush?" he inquires, smooth.

Kinda wobbly, Kelly gets to his feet and stands leanin' on the table, blinkin' at that straight flush in clubs. He rubs his sleeve across his eyes; takes another drink. Not a sound in the barroom. My finger nails are gougin' my palms. I know Pennock has an automatic lyin' right in his lap; I see that hombre's eyes on Kelly.

"You win," mutters my side pardner. He staggers towards the door, mumblin', "Mus' hunt up my helper, Matty, the kid cowpoke."

I follow Kelly. I want to sober him up, tell him what a mess we're in, what we're up against. We never can buy the steers now or go back home to the Three Open A. I want to ask him what to do, but Dice don't even know who I am. All he wants is to lie down anywhere and snooze. The man I'd made a hero! I half carry him down to the livery barn, where a sleepy hostler, about to bed down in the office hisself, sez, "Got a double handful, ain't you, kid?"

I get Kelly into the empty stall where I'd spread out our bed, and leave him there, with all his clothes on 'cept his boots, dead to the world.

Back to the War Bonnet Saloon I go. All the rest of the town is dark. It's been a dead burg anyhow this night, even onlookers at the game havin' been scarce. I peep into the saloon and see the tinhorns takin' a drink with the bartender and laughin' low about somethin'. They say good night and come out. I flatten myself 'gainst the dark wall till they pass me, after which I trail 'em and watch 'em go into a small cottage on a back street.

I think again of the sheriff, hunt up his quarters and rout him out of bed. A lean hombre he is, with the manners of a buzzard, straight black hair, dark eyes set too close together and a great red beak of a nose. What the seven kinds of hell is eatin' on a feller to get him up at this hour, he wants to know?

"Couple of damned crooks in your town. Card sharps, cheats. They've just done my pard out of more'n eight thousand dollars!"

"Yuh say they won eight thousand berries?" asks the sheriff.

"Yep."

"Who?"

"Hempel and Pennock."

"The sons o' guns! I'll get 'em."

The sheriff jumps into his clothes and asks for details as him and me go up the dark, silent street. "You wait outside," sez he as we reach the house

of Hempel and Pennock. "I'll talk to them birds alone."

He pounds on the locked door. After some time Hempel asks who 'tis. "The law!" hollers the sheriff. "Me! Gill Ferris."

He goes in, me crouchin' down outside, tryin', with no luck, to hear what goes on. But the interview must ha' been mighty satisfyin' to Sheriff Gill Ferris. As we walk towards his quarters, I ask the question I'm bustin' to ask, "Did you get back our money?"

"Young feller, you drug me out on a wild goose chase. The yarn Hempel and Pennock tells don't jibe with your'n a-tall. They wasn't gamblin' no time, not tonight nor no other time recent. They never seen you nor your pard; wasn't even in the War Bonnet Saloon. Yuh shore tried to pull the wool over my eyes."

I'm so taken aback I can't speak for two minutes, then I tell Gill Ferris he's a liar and a crook hisself. I'll wring his neck.

"Shut up, kid!" he yelps. "You and that pard of your'n had better be outa town afore eight o'clock tomorrow mornin' or I'll run you both in."

Leavin' me cussin' him, he goes into his shanty and shuts the door.

Course I ain't so dumb but I see that Gill Ferris has had his palm greased. It's a heck of a state of affairs when the sheriff throws in with tinhorns, but what am I goin' to do 'bout it? I'm red-hot mad at Pennock, Hempel, the sheriff—and at Dice Kelly. Fine, responsible cowpuncher he's proved himself. I'm madder'n ever 'cause of how I've admired him.

Then I think of our boss's last words to me: "Cowboys always get what they go after." Well, I'll sober up my pard and see what he can do.

Soberin' Kelly, who's snorin', dead to the world, proves some job. I drag him outa the bed far enough so I can slosh his head with cold water, and I shore work on him. But it's a coupla hours afore I get Dice kinda into his right senses.

He don't seem to have no idea of what happened, but finally remembers startin' to play stud with two strangers. After that he can't remember what took place. He's cranky, ornery, plain savage towards me, but I ain't payin' no 'tention to his hard words.

"Wal," he finally says, "the money's gone. I know you talk straight, kid. If you say I gambled it away, I reckon I did. Hell's bells, how my head aches."

"Them tinhorns played crooked," sez I. "I seen 'em whip-sawin' you and dealin' crooked, and the sheriff's a damn crook hisself."

Dice pulls his six-shooter and looks to see if it's loaded. "I know how to get that wad," he mutters, gettin' to his feet. "Kid, lead me to the shanty whar them tinhorns is."

"Kelly, you can't—you ain't to hold up nobody. That's robbery. We'd get jailed!"

"Dry up, Matty!" the big brute snarls. "Take me to that shanty!"

"I won't, if you're goin' to—"

"Get movin' or I'll blow your head off!" Kelly sticks his gun in my face, and the terrible way he looks, like he wasn't more'n half human, makes me think he will kill me if I don't mind. So I lead him to the cottage on the back street.

"Now go get all our horses, kid," growls Kelly. "Bring 'em here. We'll be ridin' pronto."

I just move back into the dark, for I've got to see what happens. Kelly tries the front door, finds it locked, steps round the little house, picks up a piece of board and smashes a window all to smithereens. This sure stirs up a hornet's nest. Excited voices come from inside:

"What the dickens?"

"Who's there?"

In through that busted window goes Kelly while I run to it. Pitch dark inside the room; dim figures springin' outa bed. Dice pounces on one man and slams him into a corner, grabs the other and smacks him down on top of

his pard. Strong? That red-headed cowpuncher's a human bull, swift, brutal, savage!

A couple of terrified shrieks. Up bounce both tinhorns 'fore Kelly can get hold of 'em again, and fight him back, like cornered rats. Everything in that room's a total wreck. Thud of fists and feet and bodies. Smash of breakin' furniture. Slam, bang and crash as Kelly hurls the two tinhorns this way and that.

Silence, broken only by Kelly's heavy breathing. He's laid 'em both low.

"Whar's that money?" the cowpuncher rumbles.

"In the safe in that corner," comes a reply.

"Open it!"

High time now for me to get our horses, so I leg it to the stable. But I don't think we ought to stay in this town long enough to get all our horses and pack up one of them, so I saddle two and race toward the cabin. It's just come to me how sounds of that fight must have roused a lot of citizens. It has, too. Near the cottage are a dozen men who jump away and crouch as Kelly walks through them, gun out.

"A hold-up!" somebody yells.

"Bandits!" hollers another.

"Stop him! Stop him!" bellows a voice from the cottage. "He's robbed us!"

But nobody seems to want to stop Kelly. I gallop up to meet him. He grabs the bridle reins and leaps to his saddle.

"Got it all back, kid," he grunts. "Come on."

Shouts, curses, all kinds of noise as we thunder out of town.

"I didn't get our other horses," I remarks.

"Uh? Did we have more ponies?" mutters Kelly. "I'm still drunk as hell. Wish you'd seen the scrap, kid. Shore did man-handle them two mealy-mouthed coyotes. Only way I seen to get back that dinero."

"Dice," I yelp, "I hear horses! Posse after us. What'll we do?"

"I dunno," he replies. "Might kill a few."

"Pard," I gasps, "we're in bad enough a'ready. If we kill anybody it'll be the noose for us."

"Guess you're right. Kid, more cash was in them crooks' safe than I ever seen afore, but I only took what belonged to S. R. Vail. Wish my cabeza'd clear. I can't think. If we go to the J Bar J ranch we may get Johnnie Nash in bad, too. Can't you figger somethin'?"

Ring of hoofs on the hard road behind us. Our own ponies are tearin' along down a lane. Stars overhead. Dark fenced fields to right and left. I do some desp'rate thinkin'.

"Say, Kelly," I burst out, "them tinhorns couldn't 'a' known for sure who 'twas cleaned up on 'em there in the dark. Let's hide the money out here, ditch the posse, get back into town, stable our horses, and both go to bed!"

"Might work," allows Kelly. "But don't you figger them roosters chasin' us got horses at that stable?"

"Perhaps they didn't, pard. There's another livery barn a lot closer to that cottage where Hempel and Pennock lives."

"Wal, let's try your scheme." Kelly reins up abrupt, jumps off, and shoves a wallet under a rock beside the road. "Mark this spot careful, kid," he says, impressive-like. "Heck! Here they come. Let's ride like the mill-tails of hell."

And ride we do. Soon the drum of hoofs behind us sounds fainter. I think we ought to veer off to the right and circle back gradual, but Kelly knows more'n me about ticklish situations. At last we come to a grove beside the road. Into it he rides, swings off, and holds his hand to his pony's nostrils, tellin' me to do the same. 'Bout ten seconds later that posse, 'bout twelve men in all, thunder right on past our hidin' place!

Back to the livery stable in Three Feathers we ride. The hostler is asleep in his bunk in the office, but I keep an

eye on him while Kelly leads in our horses, unsaddles 'em, rubs 'em down, and puts 'em in stalls. Our bed is just as we'd left it. Seems like nobody had come to this barn durin' the excitement, though we can't be sure.

We pull off our boots and bed down, and I go sound asleep. Next I know I hear a voice calling.

"Hi, you birds! Been sleepin' all night?"

It's daylight. Sheriff Gill Ferris, Hempel, Pennock and half a dozen other men are gazin' at me and Kelly. I yawn and rub my eyes. Kelly acts like he's still drunk. Ferris grabs his shoulder and shakes him.

"G'wan away an' lemme 'lone," growls Kelly.

"Let you alone, nothin'!" the sheriff bellers. "Come out of it. You birds are under arrest."

"Why?" I mutter.

"You know why!" retorts Ferris, favorin' me with a black scowl. "Drag 'em outa bed and search 'em, boys."

Stupid and drunken, Kelly grunts his protest. Four of them hombres strip the covers off us, get our guns and search us. They search the bed too.

Ferris looks at Hempel and Pennock.

"Can't find no money," he sez.

"Just the same, that's the desperado who robbed us," Hempel declares, glarin' murder at Kelly.

Kelly blinks. "Anybody got a bottle? If you ain't, go 'way an' quit foolin'."

"Where's the money you stole offen these men here?" yowls the sheriff.

Kelly stares like he don't savvy a-tall. One of the citizens speaks up. "Hempel, Pennock, you positive this is the robber? I saw somebody come out of your house and meet a man on a horse—a man who led another horse. Then the two of 'em tore outa town. And I helped chase 'em for ten miles last night before we lost 'em. After what happened seems queer that they'd be found here, asleep."

Sheriff Ferris calls the hostler who'd been on night duty.

"Last evenin' this young puncher," says the hostler, pointin' at me, "brung seven hosses—one packed and one saddled besides the one he was ridin'—into the stable and spread his bed in this stall. Quite some time later he come back with this big feller so drunk the kid was just about packin' him. The kid put the soak to bed and I s'pose rolled in hisself. I went to sleep an' that's all I know."

"You're a bright fella," snorts Ferris. "You didn't hear no hosses goin' out nor comin' in durin' the night? You didn't hear nothin'? Jus' too dang bad some of us didn't get hosses at this barn, 'stead of at the other one. Wal, we'll jug these hombres."

I'd had great hopes we'd get out of the nasty mess, but them hopes does a wildcat. "On what charge?" I demands.

"Plenty charges," sez the John Law. "Come along."

Kelly says nothin'. He's still actin' like he don't savvy what it's all about—some swelligant actin', too. We're taken to the jail, Ferris, Hempel and Pennock comin' into the cell with us.

"Now then, hombre," rasps the sheriff to Kelly. "You robbed Hempel and Pennock, and beat 'em up somethin' scand'lous. A charge of assault and battery agin you, as well as robbery. Whar's the cash?"

"Dunno what you're squawkin' about," sez Kelly.

"Spit 'er out! Whar's that money? We're goin' to give you the third degree, feller."

Ferris has his gun in his hand, but he's made the serious mistake of not handcuffin' his prisoners. Five of us are in the cell, with Kelly settin' on a bench, kinda stooped over, holdin' his hands to his head, lookin' stupid and harmless.

The sheriff steps in front of the big cowpuncher, pokes his gun into his face and grates, "Come clean!"

Roar of explodin' six-shooter. Kelly's grabbed the weapon, with Ferris pullin' trigger as the puncher shoves it

aside. Kelly's on his feet, his movements quick as a panther's. Smack! . . . His right fist drives to Ferris' chin. Thud! . . . The sheriff's down. Kelly's got the gun. Hempel and Pennock are divin' towards the door.

"Stop, you coyotes, or I'll—" the mad puncher thunders.

They stop and turn, their arms up. "Get their hardware and the keys outa Gill's pocket, Matty," Kelly orders. I hump myself to obey.

"All right," he says, cool. "Outside, but lock the door on 'em."

In the office Kelly lingers long enough to get our guns. Then we're outside the jail. "The people'll 'a' heard that shot," I gasp. "They'll be—They *are* comin'!"

"This way, kid," sez Kelly. "To the barn! It'll take them jiggers a few minutes to find out what happened."

Down an alley we race, dodge round buildings and reach the back of the stable. No human hornets on our trail yet. The hostler's eyes pop out a foot as we come in through the rear door.

"Sheriff decided he didn't want us," states Kelly. "But we want our hosses, pronto. He might change his mind. Matty, you throw the bed and grub on the pack nag."

I never packed a hoss so quick afore. In a matter of minutes we're ready to go, when the hostler asks, "How about pay for these nags?"

Neither me nor Kelly has a cent on us.

"See you later," sez my pard.

The hostler's jaw falls, but we hit our saddles and thunder out of the stable, drivin' our extra ponies ahead of us. Not a second too soon either, for here come half a dozen riders, Sheriff Gill Ferris in the lead, a rifle in his right hand.

"A crooked sheriff," says Kelly, "had orter be killed. Here goes to salivate that un."

He stars to rein up his hoss, but I holler: "Dice, you've got us in a hell of a jam already. Ye-ah, we're bogged to our necks now and sinkin' deeper every minute. If you shoot Gill Ferris there won't be a show on earth of our gettin' them J Bar J steers to S. R. Vail."

"Damn it, you're right, Matty," allows Dice, givin' his hoss the steel. "Have got you in hot water, ain't I? Cuss a fool like me, anyhow! I don't give two whoops 'bout myself but I sure had no business gettin' you into this."

Crack! speaks the sheriff's rifle behind us. "Made that lunker plumb ringy by lockin' him up in his own jug," grins Kelly. "He's out to kill now. Pleasant, eh, kid?"

Ferris shoots three times more, but all his bullets go wild, 'count of he's blazin' away from the back of a racin' hoss.

"'Pleasant?'" I snorts. "Kelly, how we ever goin' to make good on our job? That cash is hid on the south road, and here we are, fuzzin' east. Looks like we got to keep shovin' the wind or else stop lead. 'Nother thing, I don't feel right 'bout not payin' our bill at the stable."

"I collected the boss's expense money as well as the eight thousand," Kelly comes back. "If you could just get that dinero, Matty, you could send the livery stable what we owe 'em. *If* you could get it, kid."

"'Nother bunch of riders comin' lickety split behind the first ones, Kelly!"

"Looks serious," the big cowpuncher comes back at me, unconcerned. "Wal, we can outrun 'em. I got an idea corralled."

Followin' out Kelly's idea, we play tag with that big posse for a couple of hours, and then manage to lose 'em for a time. Durin' this breathin' spell, while us and our horses are all hid in a thick willow grove, by usin' an extra pair of overalls that are in our bed on the pack hoss, my coat and hat, we make a sort of dummy. This dummy we tie onto my horse, right in the saddle. From behind and from a distance it'll look like a man all right.

I hate to part company with Kelly, but it seems the only thing for us to do now. Spyin' out of the willows we locate the posse not more than a quarter mile distant, evidently tryin' to track us down. Kelly gives my hand a squeeze, sayin':

"The whole damn thing's my fault, but you've sure stuck by me and you ain't raised hell with me like you might ha' done. Good luck to you, kid."

"Good luck to you too, Kelly. I dunno if I'll ever see you again," and I choke up.

"You will," he promises.

Then, whoopin' all our extra hosses ahead of him, and leadin' my pony with the dummy on its back 'longside his saddle hoss, he goes tearin' away north, 'cross country.

The posse sees him bust out of the willows on the side furthest from them and they come just a-zippin'. Through the willows they crash, one rider comin' within a few feet of runnin' me down. But he don't see me, and on they all go, hell-bent after Kelly.

Still followin' out the plan fixed up by that tough, go-gettin' hombre, Dice Kelly, I hoof it back to where that cash is hid under a rock. I get it, and still keepin' pretty much to cover, finally reach the J Bar J ranch.

There I tell two-three curious ranch hands I rode to Three Feathers on the stage and lost my hat in a high wind. I also tell 'em I'm from the Three Open A and want to see Johnnie Nash. By good luck Nash is to home, and after one look at the fine, clean-cut, young rancher I know he's all to the good and make up my mind pronto to spill the whole thing.

"Kelly may be a gambling, drinking fool," Johnnie remarks when I've finished talkin', "but I admire his guts. Since he robbed two lousy tinhorns I don't figure that's any crime. No, he deserves a medal for it. And our sheriff's a crook! Hum," thoughtful.

"Hoped you'd see it that way," sez I. "Kelly is makin' that posse b'lieve the two of us are shovin' the wind outa the country, so I've got a chance to get them steers to the Three Open A. . . . Here's the cash for 'em, Johnnie, and I want you to mail this ten-dollar bill to the Harrison Livery Stable in Three Feathers."

Johnnie Nash fits me out with an old hat, a saddle, a small cavvy of ponies—one packed—and a puncher named Jenkins to help me take the cattle home. On this trip back to the Three Open A me and Jenkins keeps away from the town of Three Feathers, you betcher, and the second night out from the J Bar J we shove our steers into a range brandin' corral that'll hold 'em nice and save us the trouble of night herdin'.

Shortly after dark, while Jenkins and me are settin' round our campfire, gassin', three men ride up most awful unexpected-like—Sheriff Ferris, tinhorns Hempel and Pennock. Course they know me instanter and out come their guns.

"Set tight, both of you!" bellers Ferris. "Huh, this is luck for us. We seen your fire and figgered to get some grub—maybe stay all night. Kid," and he glares at me, "since you're here it's a cinch that old hellion of a pard of your'n ain't far off. 'Bout noon today we lost all trace of the pair of you and all them hosses you had."

I catch onto what the sheriff means all jake. The dummy on the hoss had kept right on foolin' them cusses, so they'd thought it was me with Kelly all the time. Now they figger Kelly must be somewheres close.

"Hombre, is them your cattle in the corral?" Ferris demands of Jenkins. "This your camp? You're a J Bar J hand, ain't you? Yeh, I know you are. I've seen you afore in Three Feathers."

I had told Jenkins about the funny deal me and Kelly had been in, for Johnnie Nash had thought it the wisest thing to do. Now he replies, proddy:

"Am I supposed to answer your questions? You can go straight to hell!"

"I'll l'arn you to sass the law!"

growls Ferris. "Hempel, take the hardware offen both these punchers and tie 'em up."

Jenkins protests hot, but the sheriff threatens him with his Colt and the look in that John Law's eyes ain't good to see. All three of them crooks are plum' tired and dirty, and their horses are wore out, but they're tickled pink to catch me.

Quick as Hempel gets Jenkins and me tied, Ferris and Pennock swing off their ponies and build up the fire so big that a consid'able amount o' territory right around us is lighted up.

"Now, younker," the John Law rasps, draggin' me close to the flames and pokin' his gun in my face, "whar's that pard of your'n? We want him worser'n we want you, and worstest of all we want that dinero he stole from Hempel and Pennock. Either you or that ring-tailed wampus cat as was with you must have that jack."

I don't answer. Pennock searches me and finds just a few dollars—part of the expense money. "The kid's jus' a figgerhead in this deal," he states. "Course the old wolf must have the money. Where is he, kid?"

"I don't know," I mutter defiant.

"The hell you don't!" Ferris bellers. "You tell us whar to lay hands on him, or I'll blow off your damned head."

"Go to hell!" I spit out. "You curs don't dare kill me."

"Don't we?" the sheriff yowls. "Hey, Hempel, you and Pennock help me shoot this little snake. All three of us'll drill him to oncet, so his murder can't be laid onto any one of us."

Tied so I can't hardly wiggle, he props me up 'gainst a saddle. Jenkins argues and protests with them locoed hombres, but they pay no 'tention to him. Ferris has Hempel and Pennock to stand right beside him, the three of 'em in line, with their six-shooters in their hands.

"Now, kid," the sheriff growls, "I'll count five, and if by that time you ain't spittin' out the dope we want, the three of us'll pump your carcass full of lead— Shut up, you J Bar J hand. We'll kill you too—afore long. Can't have no witnesses to this. . . . One!"

Ferris sure don't look like he's bluffin'. As for the two tinhorns, they now seem to me hombres who don't think no more of killin' a feller bein' than most men would of shootin' a rabbit. Fishy-eyed, thin-lipped, merciless cusses they are sure nuff.

"Two!" rumbles Ferris.

"My God, man, you can't—" Jenkins shouts.

Crash of a shot. Ferris has fired at the J Bar J cowboy, and I see poor Jenkins drop back where he's sittin' by the fire.

"Reckon that shows you we mean business, kid," snarls the sheriff.

"But, men," I yelp, "I can't tell you where Kelly is. I don't know. I tell you, *I don't!*"

"'Course you do. . . . Three! . . . Four!"

"Look here, you killin' devils," I holler. The cold sweat is standin' out all over me, yet oddly enough I ain't thinkin' so much of my own life as I am of the steers that got to be delivered to the Three Open A. I'm thinkin', too, of S. R. Vail's, "A cowboy always gets what he goes after."

"Fi—" Ferris begins to say.

"Talk to me awhile!" booms a voice I know well.

In the bright firelight right behind them three killers has appeared the big form of Dice Kelly, a gun in his hand.

"Drop your smokers! H'ist your mitts!" he thunders.

Like they'd been touched by a red-hot brandin' iron, Ferris, Pennock and Hempel pivot. Streaks of flame spit outer their guns. Fire flashes from Kelly's weapon. Deafenin' crash as four Colts roar as one. Boom and thunder, as those weapons flame again and again. Dice Kelly is down on his knees, holdin' his lead-chucker steady with both his hands. It's explodin'. Pennock has fallen over on his face. Now Hempel is reelin' round and round like a drunk man, gun lost, arms

floppin'. He totters into the fire and shrieks horrible as he falls.

Ferris makes a jump towards Kelly. His Colt is empty. He's swingin' it as a club. A bullet meets him and it lifts him back. He's down. Pennock rolls out of the fire, yells again then quivers and goes limp. The three killers are all down—and so is Dice Kelly.

Silence, in which I hear the scairt cattle in the corral millin' about wild, as well as horses runnin' somewhere near. Silence, and the groanin' and moanin' of somebody who's wounded.

"Kelly, Kelly!" I shout. "Oh, Kelly, they didn't get you?"

No answer. But here, spurrin' their horses up into the firelight come half a dozen riders. Two men among 'em I know, Johnnie Nash and the bartender of the War Bonnet Saloon, two others I'd seen before—men that talked to Kelly and me that mornin' in the stable when we was throwed in jail.

The newcomers take in the whole scene in one look. All swing off their horses. Four of 'em look at Ferris, Hempel, Pennock and Dice Kelly. Johnnie Nash unties me while the sixth man carries Jenkins up to the fire.

"This hombre," he says, "has a scalp wound. Stunned bad, but he'll come out of it all jake."

I sure am relieved to hear that piece of good news. "But Kelly?" I call out, "Is he—?"

"He's bullet-riddled, just shot all to hell," replies the bartender. "But, son, your rip-tootin' side-pardner snuffed out three human sidewinders afore he went west. Shore done some good work!"

"Good work? Yes!" exclaims a tall, lean man with a strong face and good eyes—kind eyes. He comes over to Johnnie Nash and me. "This the kid you were telling me about, Johnnie?"

"Uh-huh," returns Nash. He looks at me and says, "Meet Frank Cleland, mayor of Three Feathers, Matty. I thought our mayor ought to know what kind of a sheriff we had, so—"

"Johnnie told me the facts of this deal," Cleland breaks in. "I'd suspected Gill Ferris of being a grafter and crook, so what Johnnie said—"

"Kinda cinched it," the owner of the J Bar J interrupts. "Me and Cleland got hold of the bartender of the War Bonnet Saloon. He's straight enough himself even if things like that do happen in his saloon, and he told us Hempel and Pennock gypped Dice Kelly."

"Robbed him!" growls the mayor. "Robbed him! Held him up worse than if they'd done it at the point of a gun. Kelly isn't the only man those tinhorns fleeced, either. Gill Ferris was getting his split from 'em right along."

"What's more," says Johnnie Nash, "in the sheriff's office we found descriptions of them two crooks. Ye-ah, Hempel and Pennock were *wanted for murder, and Gill Ferris knew it.*"

"Then—then—" I gasp, "there won't be no charges agin me or agin Kelly?"

"I should say not!" returned Cleland. "In fact, us Three Feathers people owe Dice Kelly a vote of gratitude and more. By the way, all of our men who were out hunting you two punchers came back to town today—all except Ferris, Hempel and Pennock."

"Cleland and I were scairt Ferris and *his pals* would find you and Jenkins, kid," Johnnie remarks, "so we got a few men together and rode out this way. Too darned bad we didn't get here sooner!"

I gaze at the rancher with all the gratitude a fella can put into a look. "'Twas you as fixed things for us, Johnnie, for me and Kelly. Too bad Dice—" I choke and can't go on.

"I know how you feel, son," says the cowman soft, puttin' his arm around my shoulders. "Yes, I savvy. You thought the world and all of that rough and ready scrapper, Dice Kelly. But pull yourself together. Take these cattle to old S. R. Vail and tell him—"

"I'll tell him," I cut in, "that even though I see now that Kelly was no man for any kid to copy after, he'll always be a whole lot more to me than just a hero!"

POUND FOR POUND

By Frederick L. Nebel

He was a brute of a man. His boast was that no one nor anything was bigger or stronger than himself. The test came for him when drums beat in the jungle and an avenger came out of his past life.

HURD was his name. At least, that was the name he gave Leong Wung, and since the Chinaman was as discreet as he was wise, it did not matter to him at all.

"It is no beauty spot," remarked Leong, "this country where you will go. Fever, isolation, perhaps troublesome natives, all are there."

"Nasty niggers is my meat," clipped Hurd.

Leong gazed dreamily through the window at Matang Peak. "Eternal jungle heat and smell, sweltering days."

"Sa-ay!"

Leong shifted his eyes and laid them gently, lazily, on the man who sat facing him. Hurd's grating interruption had petered away, and there remained no sound but the faint swishing of the *punkah*, propelled by a Malay who sat outside the door, half-asleep, moving his foot back and forth. with monotonous rhythm.

Leong, half a century old, was adept in the art of studying faces, weighing what he saw in them, and locking his impressions in the chambers of his mind. In Hurd he saw a large, rough-

hewn face, browned and lacerated by many years beneath the tropic sun. A wide, full-lipped mouth, the nether lip protruding and gleaming with moisture. Broad nostrils. Tawny-colored hair, clipped close to a bullet head. Pale eyes of an indeterminate blue, large and hard as agate. And those shoulders—the shoulders of a bull, arms like oak boughs, and a chest that strained at a soiled white shirt, open at a steel-thewed neck.

"Sa-ay, what are you tryin' to do, scare me?" Hurd's eyes dilated and his mouth hung open as if he were awed beyond the power of further speech.

Leong made a tired gesture with his thin hand. "No-o. I am trying to paint a picture—"

"Rats," cut in Hurd, and laughter rumbled deep in the cavern of his throat. "I ain't worryin' none, mister. Forget your pictures. There ain't nothin' scarin' me—no man nor god nor any blasted stink-hole under the sun. And as for nasty niggers, it's the likes o' them that keep me young. You say you got a station back country. All right. You say the guy that's there now, he's half off his nut and aims to come out. You say my bizness is to get coal outa some mines you got there. All right. Now I says, I'm willin' to go, work your niggers to hell and beyond and turn loss into profit. That's that. So lay off yappin' and let us get right down to brass tacks."

"So-o," mused Leong, again fixing his eyes on Matang Peak.

Well, he needed a man for that station. Men were hard to get. You didn't have a variety to pick from. You had to pick up what strange flotsam drifted in and make the best of it. Why Hurd was so eager to get the job, to bury himself in the Sarawak hinterland, was no concern of Leong's. Leong needed a man. He needed one right away.

Wherefore he said, "Two days hence, you will leave."

"Sure. Any time suits me. The quicker the better. I'll run this dump of yours, and I'll break any black pup's back that tries to get nasty. Sure. But you'll get results, mister. Just watch!"

Leong summoned a boy. Hurd drank whiskey straight, and without a chaser. When he finished he held up the empty glass.

"I'll need lots o' this," he said. "I'll take a supply in with me. Sure."

The Chinaman was writing ideographs on a sheet of coarse green paper, seemingly oblivious to Hurd's remark, to his presence even. There was something subtly remote about Leong—like an image behind glass that you can see, but cannot touch.

HURD descended upon that God-forsaken station full of health, blasphemy and satanic ambition. The little schooner that brought him was prepared to take out the wasted wreck of a man whom he was relieving.

The man sat in a Singapore chair on the veranda of the company bungalow, unshaved, dismal-eyed, cynical. He did not rise when Hurd came rocking up the planked walk that led from the jetty to the compound. He snapped away a dead cigarette, and his hand hung limp.

"Well," boomed Hurd, "here I am. You the guy that's goin' out? Hell, you look like a shadder, so help me! What the hell happened to you?"

The man wore a cynical smile. "Oh, nothing, old chap—nothing. Only dysentery, beriberi and a few other minor ailments not worth mentioning."

Hurd stood with arms jammed to his hips, a gloating look on his huge face. "Country beat you, eh? That's tough. Well, it takes a tough hide, mister; a tough hide to stand it."

"You're by way of being tough, I take it?"

"Who, me?" Hurd chortled and took an abrupt tobacco shot. "Yeah, I guess I am. Anyhow, I'm tough enough for this country. If I wasn't, I wouldn't ha' come."

The men almost snickered. "Why *did* you come?" he asked.

"That's my bizness—why," said Hurd.

"Quite so. I thought the same, one time. I robbed a bank in Shanghai, and I took this rather than a trial and a fairly decent jail. Now I'm ready to go out and take my medicine. I've half an idea you'll be doing the same before so very long."

Hurd bit him with a keen stare. "What makes you think I'm in the same kinda boat?"

"I can't fancy any man coming here for the scenery." The man shrugged. "Well, that's your own affair. I'm all packed. I'll initiate you into the simple routine. It's very simple—quite."

He had two days in which to initiate Hurd. During that time the schooner took on a cargo of coal, and when it finally sailed, the wasted white man stood aft by the taffrail and watched the station slowly pass from sight.

And Hurd was in charge. He was virtually lord of all he surveyed, lord of a hundred-odd natives and, so he believed, lord of their souls and their destinies. And lord of his own. Heat he did not mind. He seemed to thrive on it. He laid down the law, his law, in iron-bound terms generously trimmed with sizzling profanity. He gave his half-caste foreman to understand that that law was not to be taken lightly under any circumstances, and that he would lambaste the first miscreant into within an inch of his life—or snuff that life out, if he were so inclined.

In the days that followed he sweated every ounce of work out of his crew that was possible. He drove them after the manner of a hard-boiled teamster. He was always on the job, always full of dynamic energy, and he carried a whip at his waist. The natives came to fear that whip. It had a habit of leaping into action on the slightest provocation. Sometimes it needed no provocation.

He was a supreme egotist of the white race. He believed himself the equal of all those natives put together. He did not fear them, did not speculate on the proverbial worm that turns. He slept at night soundly, with his doors open, and awoke each day brimming with vitality and seeking new fields in which to exploit his brutality.

Schooners came and went—came empty and went away laden with coal. A month passed, and another, and still another. And still Hurd lived and drank and swore and drove his men. Of course, three or four had passed on to another realm—one with fever, two at the hands of Hurd.

And then fever smote Hurd, and the natives whispered among themselves, and some sneaked off into the dripping jungle at night to build devil fires and pray for the white man's death. But Hurd did not die. He did not even take to his cot. He drank himself out of the fever, saturated himself with rum, tossed in the stifling gloom at night and went about by day wielding his whip and roaring his challenge to the men and the jungle and to God.

To the half-caste foreman he said, "I can see the looks in them black pups' eyes. They're wishin' to holy hell I'll croak. Yah, I know. But I ain't croakin', see? Not me. The fever ain't big enough to get me. Nor the jungle. Nor all you lousy swine put together. There ain't nothin' big enough to beat me. Get outa my sight or I'll cave in your half-breed mug!"

It seemed the man did not know fear. Or else he was so highly contemptuous of the natives that sheer brazen gall carried him on. The strain of the brute within did not demand a cause for stimulation. He roved about, day in and day out, forcing issues, making his own causes, and his whip became caked with dried blood.

Drums booming far back in the hills did not worry him. He merely oiled his rifle and his revolver, and let them boom on. He laughed scornfully at his natives when he saw them pause in their labors to lift a listening ear and gaze with fear-glazed eyes at the tawny-shouldered mountains that bulged

against the blue. And then he sailed into them, with his whip cracking.

"Get to work! Hop to it! I'll give you day-dreamin'!"

That night a tropical storm whipped the darkness into chaos. Rain, great sheets of it, thrashed through the tangled fretwork of the jungle; a maniacal wind hooted and screamed through the compound; monkeys screamed and chattered frantically in the branches. Lightning crackled and spat, impaling the clouds, revealing for brief moments the torn and tattered sky. Thunder rumbled across the heavens, boomed and cannonaded, throbbed and vibrated in the jungle, shook the native huts and the stilts upon which they stood. And the natives cowered in the gloom, muttering strange prayers.

Hurd stood on the veranda of his bungalow, naked but for a pair of dirty white pants, rolled up over stout, hairy calves. He stood with his hands in his pockets and a pipe between his teeth, gazing up at the weird, ghastly interplay of flashes. And on his face there was a thin, fixed leer; a brazen twinkle lit up his agate eyes. Once he saw a bolt strike near the river and a huge tree crash down to earth. He chuckled, and spoke to the vault of the hidden sky.

"Suit you better if you clouted one o' them there stinkin' nigger huts."

He chuckled again, more intimately this time, and knocked the ashes from his pipe.

A moment later there was a blinding flash, a terrific clap, and the ripping of timbers. Hurd was catapulted from the veranda and slammed against a nearby tree. He choked for breath, rolled over, sat up and saw half of his bungalow gone and the rest in flames. He heaved up to his feet and stood spread-legged, his fists clenched and his jaw set hard. He cocked an eye upwards and his lip curled.

"You will, will you!" he snarled.

Then he jumped for the veranda and dived into the burning remains of the bungalow. He reappeared a minute later, carrying a case of whiskey under each arm. He stood for a moment in perplexed indecision, then dropped the cases and ran back again. When he came out he had his rifle and revolver and an armful of clothes.

He strode across the compound and banged into the nearest hut. A moment later half a dozen natives came out on the fly, some propelled by their own legs, others by the foot of Hurd. Then Hurd appeared, went over to pick up his cases of liquor, and settled down in the hut for the night.

He was out bright and early next day, and started off in his best form by knocking out the head of the family which he had so unceremoniously thrown out the night before, because that paternal head tried to argue the issue. Then he whipped a dozen natives into action and told them that he wanted a new bungalow; and, since the hut was a dirty rotten stink-hole, he said he wanted the new bungalow in a hurry and he'd make them work night and day toward that end.

Under a convenient tree, in the shade of its foliage, he sat down with his whip and gun and a bottle of liquor and cursed himself blue in the face getting them under way. A couple of days later he moved in, found fault right and left, mistook the half-caste foreman's silence for stubbornness, and planted a fist between his eyes. The man carried a brace of shiners for a week.

It was, perhaps, Hurd's tireless persistence that carried him on from day to day. He had crushed whatever spark of spirit there might have been in the natives by working them to the point of physical exhaustion. He never gave quarter, never permitted them to get their second wind. He drove them to the very end of their tether, and then played with them at will. In war, the best way to break the enemy's line is to keep hammering it. The same applies to the spirit of a man. And since these natives had not much spirit to begin with, it is no great

wonder that Hurd reigned on as master of that dark nook in the wilderness.

"I'm gettin' bored," he mused one night. He lounged in a steamer chair, half-naked. A fat, yellow moon crawled lazily up out of the jungle. The river murmured by. The thick, liquid breath of the tropics carried a stench of mud and decay, and the night pressed down like a fat, moist hand. "I'm gettin' bored. I got no opposition. Well, that's niggers. They ain't got no guts."

The marvel of it was that he had turned loss into profit, had sent away every one of Leong Hung's schooners with full cargoes. Leong had commended him by letter. The method was no concern of the Chinaman's. He was discreet, and a business man, and the end, not the means, was paramount.

So Hurd was becoming bored. He was, in a way, surfeited with pleasure. For unleashing his brutality against the natives constituted a pleasure, unholy though it was, and in all human nature the most desirable of pleasures wanes with time.

Hurd yawned. He got up, flexed his massive arms, and rolled inside. A small oil lamp burned on the table, and beside it stood a bottle and some glasses. He slopped liquor into a glass, threw it down neat and rasped his throat. He stood there, staring down absently at the flame in the lamp, and shoved tobacco into his pipe.

He looked up, and then his hands stopped moving. He blinked his eyes, and his forehead wrinkled.

"Not a move, Hurd!" The voice was low, almost placid. It came from a man who stood in the doorway. A battered topi shaded most of his face, but did not hide a small, square chin and a clean-cut mouth with muscle-lumps at the corners. He was lean, this stranger, and of no great height. His sleeves were rolled up and his arms were thin and nut-brown, and in one hand he held a big automatic pistol.

Hurd muttered one word: "MacQuade!"

The man chuckled, softly, mockingly. He came in slowly, and there was about him an air of capability. Presently the table was between them, and the ghost of a smile, thin and bitter and hard, lurked about MacQuade's lips.

"Showdown, eh, Hurd?"

Hurd's pale agate eyes burned with a cold, steady fire. His wide nostrils twitched.

MacQuade said: "Gun on the table, now."

Hurd must have known the man well. He did not hesitate. MacQuade picked up the revolver and flung it across to the cot.

"Well. . . ?" muttered Hurd.

"You know. Or maybe your memory's failing you. Remember Celebes, the trading station? Remember old Andrews? Two shots in the back that night. Kind of surprised you when you found that after all there were no pearls in the pouch. Only a collection of old coins that Andrews was collecting for his little boy back home. And how Andrews prized those coins! Thought you got me, too, didn't you? I'm little, Hurd, but my hide's tough.

"I wandered into Buching. I ran into a wreck of a chap who was half off his head. He drank a lot and rambled in his talk. Cursed Sarawak up, down and across. Remarked about another fellow, the land would get in time. Big fellow, loud-mouthed as hell, he said. I thought it might be you." He paused, flexed his lips.

"Well. . . ?"

MacQuade shrugged. "Well, what? You don't suppose I came back country to pay you a friendly visit? Hell, no, Hurd. I came here to kill you!"

"You're crazy!"

"Which has nothing to do with my killing you." He smiled his thin, acrid smile. "Kill you, Hurd. Just kill you. No fuss or frills about it. The bullet you put in me—well, we'll forget that. But Andrews. You put two in him. One in the small of the back, the other a little higher, between the shoulder

blades. If you can stand on your feet long enough, I'll pick out the same spots on you."

"You're—crazy!"

"As a matter of fact, I'm not. I'm quite sane. I simply have a methodical way of doing things. Pound for pound, you know." He stopped; listened.

Faint and far away, they heard the beating of a jungle drum.

A lizard fell upon the table between them, then crawled away hurriedly.

Sweat stood out on Hurd's face in great, glistening beads. It dripped from his chin. His huge hands were knotted. The cords in his neck bulged, and a glaze came upon his eyes. He felt that glaze, and an ironic rebound of memory recalled to his mind the same look in the eyes of a native over whom he had stood and beaten with his merciless whip. He looked into the black muzzle of the automatic. It was so steady, like the lean hand that held it. With the slight moving of a finger MacQuade could crush him, batter down his mountain of life and energy and bone and muscle. The thought was like an electric shock. It shook his whole frame.

"Don't be a fool!" he grated, and his chest heaved.

"I'm not," said MacQuade calmly.

Another lizard dropped from the ceiling. It landed on MacQuade's forehead, slid across his eyes. Instinctively he jerked back and brushed a hand up across his face.

For a split second Hurd's breath was bated. Then his knee shot up and struck the table. Table and lamp crashed against MacQuade and he reeled backward, fighting for balance. Hurd bolted for the door like a mad bull. MacQuade, even while reeling, twisted and fired, but the shot only smashed the door frame, an inch or so behind Hurd's head, and then the big man was hurtling from the veranda, heading for the bush.

MacQuade came sliding out of the door a moment later. He caught a fleeting glimpse of a white torso. He snapped up his gun, but the target vanished in the jungle. He started off with a muttered oath, and sped past a group of murmuring, astonished natives.

Then he, too, was in the tangled network of the jungle, and he could hear Hurd tearing and ripping his way through the thickets, somewhere in the dank gloom ahead. Infrequently MacQuade spotted the man, but only for the briefest of moments.

Underfoot the ground was porous and soggy, covered with dead rot, and in places treacherous with nauseous ooze, where strange, unseen things slithered. Matted lianas knitted the trees together, and these trees stood on gaunt, spiderlike roots through which a man might crawl. The moonlight, penetrating here and there the roof of the jungle, hung suspended like an incandescent mist. No air stirred. The wet heat was motionless, and like something tangible which a man could feel as he thrust his way through it. It was thick and sluggish in the nostrils.

MacQuade was soggy with it. His clothes stuck to his body, the hair beneath his topi grew moist and made his scalp itch. His feet rose and fell from the jungle floor with a sucking sound. The crazy lacework of lianas struck at his face and entangled his arms. When he grabbed at a vine for support his hand slid over its slimy surface.

Once he grasped that which was not a vine, but a thing that twitched and hissed. He lurched back, and his pistol belched two daggers of livid flame, and the thing, after that, neither twitched nor hissed. Strange wings whirred by in the murk, and many noises, small and indefinable, assailed his ears. They were the voices of the night and the jungle, intimate and personal voices, yet provocatively enigmatic.

Hurd was on the defensive. He was running away—running away from the black muzzle of a pistol and from a

man, a man of his own race, who talked of killing in the quietest, most matter-of-fact voice. It is not great disgrace to attempt saving one's own life. It is the most natural of instincts in all the complicated warp and woof of the human make-up.

Thus Hurd, naked from the waist up, his pants now in tatters, his feet and legs bare, suffered the torture of the jungle so that he might escape the destiny which this man MacQuade had unceremoniously mapped out for him. Destiny is too often spoken of as a cosmic force beyond the ken of men. Frequently men warp their own destinies—and others', too—and then unwittingly blame it on the Unknown.

This man MacQuade was out to kill. The closest friend he'd ever had had been shot in the back on a Celebes beach because of greed. The laws of state claim that judges and juries shall decide whether a man is to die for a criminal act. In certain parts of the world these laws are but faint whispers, so faint that they are rarely heard. The unwritten law of pound for pound is a thing of the heart; it is instinctive, and instinct has a habit of overruling the most iron-bound book law that was ever conceived.

The red sun came up, and the jungle steamed.

The chase was still in mid-career.

Hurd's brute strength had kept him in the lead. Thorns had lacerated his body all through the night, and he was covered with scratches and blood, and smeared with mud. He began to look upon the jungle as an enemy, and cursed it in his most colorful style. He drove onward with the persistence of a machine. Because the lianas and thorns clutched at him, he struck back, hurled his huge body through them, snarled at them.

"Damn you! Think you can beat me, eh?"

It was the unreasoning bull within him that sought vengeance even on inanimate objects. He did not stop to consider that in doing this he was automatically bruising his body and dissipating valuable energy, that he was building an enemy out of the vagaries of his own imagination. Memory reminded him that he had sworn he could beat any country under the sun, and in his infantile way he cloaked the jungle in an inimical personality and sought to fight it.

MacQuade was still behind. Now and then he caught sight of the fugitive, through gaps in the jungle, far ahead. Except for the ooze and a few scratches on face and arms, he appeared none the worse after the gruelling night. He weaved his way swiftly, carefully, through interlacing vines; circumnavigated rather than battered through clumps of barbed thorns; zigzagged from one bit of halfway solid ground to another, instead of stubbornly plowing through knee-deep muck. Once he even paused to lean against a tree and smoke a cigarette, while he watched Hurd slamming his way through the twisted jungle beyond.

A drum throbbed in the hinterland, and another answered it. The sun watched with a white-hot eye.

The chase went on and began to narrow down. MacQuade in his steady, systematic way, drew the net tighter. He could hear Hurd crashing through the bushes, and saw him oftener. He called out and fired a shot that he knew would not hit its mark. It ricocheted off the tangle of trees, and Hurd, looking back once, stretched his legs and cursed them because they failed to carry him faster. His backward looks occurred more frequently, and each time it seemed that MacQuade was a little nearer.

And he was. Inch by inch, foot by foot, he cut down the distance between them. The accumulated grime on his face was streaked with shining threads of sweat. The nearness of his enemy brought no unholy gleam to his eyes, no satanic set to his mouth. He looked a little haggard, a little curious, as if he were wondering just how the end would come and in what manner.

He worried Hurd with another shot. Instinctively the big man dodged. Then he looked back, and as he did he stumbled, clawed at the yielding air, and piled up in a slump of horny thickets. He roared and cursed and fought to free himself. The briars seemed to clutch and close about him. He ripped and tore and heaved violently and broke away streaked with fresh blood. Half-blinded, he toiled to his feet and lunged.

MacQuade stood in his path, with a thin, amused smile on his lips.

"Now, Hurd!" It was almost a chuckle.

Hurd rocked like a great tree in the grip of a storm. His breath pumped from his throat in harsh gusts, his chest heaved, and his nether lip hung loose and gleaming, revealing his lower teeth. His big round eyes bulged, as some men's do when they hang suspended over the brink of eternity. He struggled to gather his breath and hold it in his lungs. Men are apt to do this when something terrible is about to happen.

"You look scared, Hurd," observed MacQuade, offhand. He flexed his lips. "I guess that after all I'll have to remit an overdue payment with one piece of lead instead of two. You see, there's only one bullet left. I'll have to make it do the job of two."

"Gawd, you're a cold-blooded pup!"

There was patently no disagreement on that score.

A drum boomed, ominously close. another took up the call. And yet another, and a fourth. One from each point of the compass.

The men's eyes held, and read each other's thoughts.

"Kyans looking for long pig, eh?" said MacQuade.

Hurd flung a troubled look about them.

"Gawd!" he breathed.

"Scared?"

"They know whites is in the country!" His fists clenched. "We'll never get out alive."

"O-ho!" MacQuade seemed surprised. "Did you expect to get out alive?"

Hurd bit his lip. "You started this, damn you! You got us off here in this blasted country!"

"You're wrong there, Hurd. It was you. You set the course. I merely followed."

"It was you started it. You had a gun. You was top-dog. Me, I was under-dog. You didn't give me no break, you didn't."

"Break?" MacQuade laughed. "Why, you dirty murderer, did you give Andrews a break?"

"This is different. We're white men in a black country. Whites ha' gotta stick together against blacks."

"With one bullet between us, eh?"

"Gawd, I just seen a spear!"

MacQuade saw one too, but in a different part of the jungle. His eyes steadied, his mouth grew a little grim.

"We're trapped," he said simply. "The jungle is full of blacks. It means—our heads charring a few days hence over a devil-devil fire. Pleasant thought."

"Mine, you mean," choked Hurd. "You got a bullet left—for yourself. But me—what about me? You caused this, MacQuade!"

"I've got a bullet left," echoed MacQuade. "And I'm not the kind commits suicide. Strange, even in a situation like this, but none the less true."

They were concealed in the thickets, but they could see spears flashing, here and there.

"I'll tell you what, Hurd. It's the last straw. But I'm game." He paused and thrust a hand into his pocket, drew out a small coin. "We'll toss. Heads I keep the gun and blow out your brains when the Kyans close in. Tails you get the gun and blow out mine. That's an even break all around. Here." He threw the coin to Hurd and the big man caught it and closed his hand about it.

"Well," said MacQuade, "toss."

Hurd did not budge. He drew his

lips together and let his breath slip quietly from his nostrils. His big eyes blinked, and he swallowed hard. He tried to read MacQuade's eyes, but the small man was still wearing his thin, strange smile.

Then Hurd opened his hand and looked at the coin, turned it over, and held it in the palm of his sweaty hand.

"Well," came MacQuade's placid voice, "toss."

Hurd's lower lip fell open and hung suspended. "How do I know you'll play square?"

"How do I know you will?"

Their eyes locked. In six words MacQuade had stamped himself as a supreme gambler.

"Toss," he said.

Hurd rubbed his right hand briskly along his thigh. Then he laid the coin on the knuckle of his forefinger. MacQuade watched him with keen, close-lidded eyes. His lips were motionless and the lumps of muscle at either corner bulged and were rigid.

Hurd's thumbnail clicked against the coin and it spun upward. Still spinning, it dropped back to his open palm and he clapped his other palm over it. Thus he remained for a long moment, hunched forward, his eyes riveted on MacQuade.

MacQuade's thin smile spread slowly across his lips. "Scared?"

Hurd's eyes dilated as he lowered his head and stared at the huge knuckles of his left hand, the knuckles that hid the verdict of the coin. Beads of sweat dropped from his chin to his knuckles. Then the hand began to lift, and as it did, MacQuade leaned forward, his gaze fixed on the slowly appearing palm.

Hurd suddenly lifted the concealing hand and held it poised in midair.

"Tails," said MacQuade.

Hurd's hand doubled over the coin.

MacQuade was extending his pistol. "I hope you're a good shot, Hurd. The head, mind. Spoil it for those black boys."

Hurd received the gun like a man in a trance. He stared at it transfixed, where it lay in his hand. Then his fingers closed slowly about the butt.

MacQuade was a little pale, tight-lipped. "I'm ready, Hurd."

"Gawd!"

It was the first time he had ever said the word with a hint of reverence.

"It's in your line, Hurd, plugging men," said MacQuade. "I said . . .I'm ready."

A tremor ran through Hurd. His teeth ground together. Then his muscles bulged, his neck thews stood out. He flung himself backward, rage and horror battling in his face.

"You go to hell!" he snarled. "I'll try for a getaway. The slug's for *me* —if I don't!"

He pivoted sharply and dived through the jungle.

MacQuade had not batted an eyelash, had not made a move. He stood there, absently watching the big man in his head-long flight. After a moment, when the other had disappeared, he grimaced and rubbed a finger across his wet forehead.

"Hell!" he muttered, wearily.

He sank to his knees and crawled deeper into the thickets. He flattened to his stomach and wriggled through ooze and greenish black puddles.

Presently he heard the Kyan war cry. Other voices took it up, and MacQuade lay deathly still. With the minutes the cries seemed farther and farther away. It was ironic that Hurd, in seeking to escape the Kyans, should draw the chase closer upon himself and farther and farther away from his enemy.

And the enemy, MacQuade, becoming curious because of the continued waning of the cries, lifted his head from the muck and listened more intently. Then, muffled by distance, came the unmistakable crack of a pistol.

"So," mused MacQuade, "he's done it."

He began to muscle out of the ooze. Then he turned and, bent over, weaved away through the screw pines, toward the west.

LEAD LAW

A STORY OF ROMANCE AND ADVENTURE IN THE WEST

By Amos Moore

PART THREE

BLUE STREAK DUNCAN, famous two-gun fighter, rides several hundred miles in response to a letter from his friend, Happy Bill Stone, who has been employed at the Double Box Circle, owned by Bart Willoughby. Willoughby poses as an honest rancher, but has long been suspected of being a crook and in league with Bird Snell, outlaw and cutthroat. Stone finds various things which tend to confirm these suspicions, among them evidence of the existence of a secret trail to the Double Box Circle; but he has no actual proof.

He meets Luke Caldwell, neighboring rancher, and Caldwell's daughter, with whom he falls in love. The girl persuades Stone to leave the Willoughby outfit, which arouses suspicion, and an attempt is made to put him out of the way. Wounded and marooned on a ledge in Bald Mesa Canyon, he is rescued by Caldwell and Duncan, after a series of fights in which several of the Willoughby gang are slain.

It is now clear that Bart Willoughby believes Caldwell and Stone can get enough evidence to convict him of a number of crimes, and Blue is sure that the desperadoes will make a determined effort to kill them before they can arrange a proper defense. At the Caldwell ranch he keeps a careful watch. During the early morning hours, he sees a furtive figure outside, and recognizes Aleck Lucas, Caldwell's horse wrangler. Lucas is attempting to set fire to the house. Duncan pokes a gun into his ribs, just as a bullet is fired from the shrubbery by the gate.

CHAPTER XIV

Suspicion Spreads

WITH the swiftness of a snake striking, Blue's arm whipped across his chest. A stream of orange-red flame poured from the muzzle of his own forty-five, thundering its deadly answer in the direction from which the shot had come. On the heels of the report, a shuddering shriek of agony rent the air; and, as though snapped upward by invisible wires, a convulsed form jerked into writhing silhouette above the massed shadows of the shrubbery.

Simultaneously, Aleck Lucas leaped backward and plunged into the darkness under the cottonwoods, ducking and dodging as he raced frantically for cover. Only for the fraction of a second had Blue's gun been turned away from his heart; but that fraction spelled all the difference between life and death for him. For so rapidly had the fire under the vine spread that the bright glare of it in Blue's eyes made it impossible for him to take accurate aim at the fleeing incendiary; he could see nothing, and could hear only the sound of snapping twigs and branches as the latter forced a way through the bushes.

He sent several shots drumming into the darkness; but none of them took effect, and he speedily realized the futility of throwing away his ammunition on an invisible target. Nor did he dare to give chase to Lucas, for the oil-fed fire was roaring up the side of the ranch house, and prompt measures must be taken if it were not to develop into a conflagration that nothing could check.

Blue did not hesitate. He jammed his gun back into its holster and sprang boldly into the thick of the seething mass, scattering it with a few vigorous kicks. But already the stout wooden trellis had caught in half a dozen places. He seized its supports with both hands, and with a powerful wrench, literally tore it loose from its fastenings. The framework crashed to the ground, sending up choking clouds of smoke and hurling huge glowing sparks in all directions. Here and there, branches of the vine still clung to the house wall, blazing fiercely against the seasoned old wood. Methodically, Blue tore them down and stamped on them, careless of scorched palms and singed clothing.

It was all over in a moment, the worst of the danger past before the crowd of excited punchers, buckling on their gunbelts as they ran, poured pell-mell out of the bunkhouse. Only in the room upstairs, where the curtain had fluttered from the window, a reddish light glowed suddenly, flared, and went out abruptly under the swishing splash of a bucket of water, wielded by Louise Caldwell.

Around the corner of the house Luke Caldwell came running, gun in hand, half dressed and shouting questions.

"What is it? What the devil's going on, Duncan?"

Blue yanked the last flaming branch free before he returned in a matter of fact tone:

"Oh, nothin' much, except somebody was fixin' to pull off a little barbecue, an' hired yuhr wrangler to act as cook. They hadn't invited me, but I just happened along about the right time."

Louise Caldwell, a long coat wrapped about her, had also emerged from the house now. Her father put an arm around her slim shoulders and drew her close to him as he stood looking about at the scattered embers of the fire, the charred and still glowing pieces of the broken trellis. The smell of kerosene oil was plainly discernible along with that of burnt wood and leaves; the blackened tatters of the bedroom curtain fluttered over the upper window sill.

It needed very little imagination to surmise what would have happened to the ranch house and probably to every living soul in it, had it not been for Blue Streak Duncan's watchfulness. In all probability, the fire would have gained such a headway, both inside and out, before it was discovered, that the whole building would have been a roaring inferno, from which escape might well have been impossible.

Roasted alive in their beds, perhaps; or, waking to find themselves surrounded by a wall of fire and smoke, to fight blindly for a few brief, tortured minutes, before they perished horribly in the flames or died of suffocation. Luke Caldwell could not repress a shudder as he thought of the narrowness of their escape.

"You say that Aleck Lucas set it, Blue?" he asked.

"I caught him lightin' the match. There was a big pile of rags an' trash, soaked with kerosene, under that dead vine; all he had to do was touch a light to it. They was an assistant cook on the job, too; but when he found out the party wasn't goin' to be quite as exclusive as they'd figured on first off, he sort of lost interest in the proceedin's. Yuh'll find him lyin' over there in the bushes by the gate, whoever he is."

"What about Lucas? Where is he?"

Blue shrugged. He could, however, have made a pretty accurate guess as to what had become of the treacherous wrangler.

"Couldn't say, exactly. He didn't stop to tell me where he was goin'. I heard his hawss—he must've left it down the road a ways—an' from the sound of it, I reckon he'd just remembered he had a pressin' engagement somewheres an' was late gettin' there. It's my guess he won't stay very long, though. . . . Let me have one of them lanterns a minute, will yuh, Marshall? I'll fetch it right back."

In a silence that was more eloquent than words could have been, the foreman took a lantern from one of the punchers and passed it to Blue, who strode away toward the barn, while the others, moved by a common impulse, crowded over to the gate. They did not talk, and each man eyed his neighbor with thinly veiled doubt. The ugly head of suspicion had reared itself among them. There had been one traitor in the bunkhouse. Who knew but that there had been others? Who could say how many confederates Aleck Lucas had had, or be certain that the man at his elbow had not been privy to the dastardly plot to burn the ranch house? The chilling uncertainty of that thought pressed heavily on all of them.

Stooping at the edge of the shrubbery border, Keith Marshall held the lantern so that its rays shone on the face of the body sprawled at full length on the grass. It was Sim Nicholls, and he must have died instantly. One of Blue's bullets had torn a great hole in his abdomen and another had pierced his heart.

"So that was why the skunk was hangin' around here!" the foreman said. "Bringin' his boss's orders down to Lucas! I'd ought to have suspicioned they was somethin' fishy about that fallin' out them two had! Whiles Sim was workin' here, they stuck closer'n a tick to a steer's belly; then, the minute Sim gets his ridin' orders, they starts callin' names. Hell of a lot of talkin', but nobody gets hurt. I'd ought to have knowed they was just stirrin' up dust to throw in our eyes, but, somehow, I never tumbled."

"Nor I, Marshall." Luke Caldwell said heavily. "I'd have staked about everything I've got on being able to trust every man on the place. Now—" He did not finish the sentence; but there was no need for him to go on: the implication was plain; and a little uneasy stir went through the group surrounding the body of Sim Nicholls. They knew that they were all under suspicion now, and they bitterly resented it; but none of them could blame the man whose trust had been so betrayed. They looked at the dead man, at the ground, at the flame of the lantern—everywhere but at Luke Caldwell or at one another.

"Well, I reckon there's nothing to be done about it," the rancher said presently, pulling himself together. "Better have this crow-bait carted away and planted somewhere, Marshall. And have two men on guard all the time hereafter."

Two men—one to watch the other! Aleck Lucas had been doing guard duty that night! Could anything have been more grimly ironical?

From the stable, Blue Duncan appeared, leading Powder. He mounted and rode across the yard to the group by the gate. In the wan light of the lanterns, his face looked as stern and set as if cast in bronze. When he spoke, it was in his usual soft, drawling voice that gave no hint of the cold

fury that filled him. He addressed the group collectively:

"Just after supper last night," he said, "Mr. Caldwell was tellin' me that the only law in Buckner County was lead law, an' that most of that was up at Bart Willoughby's bunkhouse. Lucas was listenin' outside the door, an' likely heard what Mr. Caldwell said. I reckon he thought it was so, too, an' he might've passed it along for a fact to some of you fellers here. Mebbe he's got friends among yuh, an' mebbe he hasn't; it don't matter—only it won't do no harm for the whole bunch of yuh to know he was mistaken an' is so goin' to find out—pronto."

"Yuh're not meanin' to go after him, Duncan?" the foreman demanded sharply. "Why, yuh're locoed, man!"

"Marshall, I'm aimin' to do just that. Him an' his pals are goin' to learn before sunup that they's some things that can't be got away with—an' burnin' folks in their beds is one of 'em. Lucas won't collect no pay for the job he tried to do here tonight. I'm goin' after him an' I'm goin' to fetch him back with me if I have to follow him to the southeast corner of hell."

"No!" Luke Caldwell exclaimed explosively. "Marshall's right, Blue—yuh're crazy to think of such a thing. Lucas has undoubtedly made straight for the Double Box Circle, and—"

"Sure he has. I won't have to waste no time trackin' him, Mr. Caldwell. Ain't it lucky? I can fog right along an' get there almost as soon as he does! The quicker he's stopped from runnin' on the rope, the sooner the whole gang'll know where to head in at."

The rancher stepped forward and put out a hand to take Powder's bridle, but the stallion tossed his head and backed away.

"Now, Mr. Caldwell, it's all settled. Don't yuh get yuhrself in a lather about such simple things as hazin' that polecat out of his burrow. I'm just goin' to fetch him down an' put him where his smell won't bother nobody for a while."

"You're going to do nothing of the sort! You must be out of your mind to think of such a thing! Go up to that den of cutthroats alone? Why, you'd be shot down like a dog if you tried it!"

"Oh, no, I reckon not, Mr. Caldwell," Blue said mildly. "Willoughby wouldn't make a fool play like that."

"He wouldn't? Do you suppose for one minute that he's going to let you ride in, take one of his men, and ride out again—alive? He's got at least forty guns up there; it would take an army to deal with him. I know what I'm talking about, Duncan. You're not to go, do you hear?"

"I reckon yuh *think* yuh know what yuh're talkin' about, Mr. Caldwell. An' mebbe, if things hadn't happened just the way they did, yuh might be right."

"I *am* right! Duncan, it won't do! After all, this isn't your quarrel, you know; you were dragged into it, and I'm not going to stand for your taking a senseless risk like that. It's just plain suicide, and I won't have it! You—"

The rancher stopped, made a gesture that was half resigned, half despairing, as he realized that most of his vehement protest had fallen on indifferent ears, and that the last part of it had been lost altogether. For Blue, becoming impatient over the delay, had touched Powder lightly with his spurs and disappeared in the darkness beyond the gate.

CHAPTER XV

Into the Lion's Jaws

BLUE STREAK DUNCAN had heard the hoofbeats of only one horse when the wrangler had galloped away from the yard, nor did he notice any sign of another. Lucas, then, had fled on the same animal that had brought Sim Nicholls down to the L Bar C—a fact which was a pretty strong indication that he had not looked for any interference with the attempt to destroy the ranch house and its occupants.

Having been assigned by the foreman to the duty of guarding the place, he had probably been confident of being able to go ahead with his fiendish work quite undisturbed, and, after its successful accomplishment, to mingle with the unsuspecting punchers and help them fight the fire. Perhaps he had even meant to give the alarm, when it was quite certain that the house was doomed!

Then, in the event that the result of the plot was not entirely satisfactory—that is, if Luke Caldwell or Happy Stone or Blue himself managed to escape from the blazing building—his usefulness as a spy for Bart Willoughby would be unimpaired. No one would dream that he was anything but what he pretended to be, or connect him, even in the remotest degree, with the disaster to the house.

However, discovery at the moment when complete success seemed assured had compelled him to abandon his rôle of loyal and faithful Caldwell employee. He had been caught red-handed, in the very act of committing a crime, the vicious and cowardly nature of which must make the gorge of any white man rise in horror and loathing of the perpetrator. True, he had gotten away with his life; but he knew what to expect if he were apprehended; and there was only one place where the vengeance of an outraged community would not promptly pursue and run him to earth: among others of his own kind who would give him shelter and protection because they were as deeply involved as he was. In the bunkhouse of the Double Box Circle, he could sleep sound and safe. Even Blue Streak Duncan would not dare to follow him there!

There was not an atom of doubt in Blue's mind that the desperado would make all possible speed for what he confidently assumed to be the sanctuary of the Willoughby ranch. Whether he went by way of the canyon road or took the secret trail through the Big Wash below Black Top — supposing that he knew it—was of no importance. All that mattered was his destination, and the fact that he would not count on being followed to it. He believed implicitly the thing that Luke Caldwell had declared: that it would take an army of men to invade Bart Willoughby's stronghold in the hills, and that any lesser force attempting the feat would never return alive.

Blue realized that it was quite possible that he would not return alive; indeed, it was more than possible: it was altogether probable. But he faced that issue unemotionally. It wouldn't be the first time by many that he had deliberately ridden to almost certain death, and with less reason than lay in his determination to capture Aleck Lucas. The quarrel hadn't been his originally, true; but once he had been drawn into it and taken sides, it had become his—until it was over. What Blue Streak started, he finished!

It was not alone the spur of Caldwell's necessity which drove him; the affair had its personal aspects. From the moment that Sim Nicholls' shot had given the L Bar C wrangler an opportunity to make his escape, Blue had known that the miscreant must be brought back and punished, or the day of Blue Streak Duncan was over.

Lucas had tricked and befooled and defied him. Very well; Lucas must be taught that such things couldn't be done with impunity, and taught in such a way as to serve as a significant example to the rest. All of Bart Willoughby's power and all of Bart Willoughby's men would not save him. He would pay. And, afterward, Willoughby and the others would pay. Or else the butt of some six-gun in the outlaw band would be carved with a proud notch to represent the wiping out of Blue Streak Duncan. And that was that!

The luminous red glow of dawn was brightening on the eastern horizon, and a soft, opalescent haze hung over the earth when Blue galloped out of the canyon and drew rein in front of

the huge Double Box Circle bunkhouse. A rapid glance through the rails of the small horse corral showed him the white-footed roan that Sim Nicholls had been riding the day before. The beast was dusty and blotched with sweat; it stood with its head lowered, its flanks heaving. It couldn't have been turned in for more than a few minutes, and that meant that Lucas had only just arrived.

No one was to be seen about the yard or buildings; but the murky yellow light of kerosene lamps gleamed out through the narrow, porthole-like windows, and there was the loud, blended murmur of many voices and the sound of movement within. Evidently, the outfit was just awakening—rather late—for the day. A light showed in the kitchen of the big adobe ranch house, too, and thick smoke was coming from the chimney. Also, someone was moving back and forth in one of the upstairs rooms; a bulky shadow was visible through its open windows.

Blue wasted not a second. He could not have timed his arrival at a more opportune moment, and he took full advantage of it. Before Powder had come to a stop at the shallow steps, he was out of the saddle and striding across the porch. The door had been left open on a crack. With a single thrust of his arm, he sent it crashing back against the wall, and stepped over the threshold.

The rush of stale air that met his nostrils was almost nauseating: a fetid reek of oil smoke, cheap whiskey and tobacco, and the effluvia of unwashed human bodies. The long room was crowded with half-dressed men; nearly every one of the numerous bunks had been occupied. On the edge of one of them, not far from the door, Aleck Lucas was sitting. He had already removed one boot and was about to draw off the other, when the door banged back against the wall, and Blue's even voice slashed through the medley of sounds in the room as a sharp knife blade cuts through a ripe melon.

"I want you, Lucas! Pull that other boot back on. Yuh're ridin' with me!"

The surprise and dismay of the wrangler were almost ludicrous. The self-complacent smile he had worn while giving a highly touched-up version of his triumphant encounter with the famous two-gun fighter, was wiped from his face by Blue's words as a wet sponge wipes chalk marks from a child's slate. He turned a sickly, greenish white as, without a word, he started to obey.

Spike Haney, his raw-boned, hairy torso bare to the waist, shouldered forward. He wore no gun, and was, therefore, in no danger from Duncan's; but he hadn't forgotten the smashing impact of the latter's fist on Twist Morgan's jaw, and he stopped at a discreet distance. His voice, too, although it could never be anything but disagreeable, was lacking in some of its customary harsh truculence, as he said:

"Now, looka here, hombre; we know yuh're Blue Streak Duncan, an' we've heard how yuh most generally do as yuh damn please where yuh come from. But that don't entitle yuh to no permit to bust into a man's bunkhouse thisaway, an' give orders like yuh was Gawd A'mighty. This here is a peaceable, law-abidin' outfit, an'—"

"Exactly!" agreed Blue. "It's a peaceable, law-abidin' outfit, which is one of the reasons why it's all right for me to do just what I'm doin', Haney! An honest, square-shootin' bunch of fellers like yuh've got here'll be plumb tickled to death to have me snake out a mangy son of a she-coyote that's just tried to roast a lot of people, includin' women folks, in their beds. Yuh'll all be glad to have a specimen like he is put where he can't pull no more of them tricks. I reckon they isn't ary other of his particular breed in the country, an' it'd be a pity was he to get loose amongst white folks."

The "honest, square-shootin' bunch of fellers" shifted uneasily under the derisive contempt of that speech, like a pack of savage but cowed beasts who

hear the crack of the trainer's whip. Probably there wasn't a man in the crowd who hadn't at least one murder to his credit; but where they were but jackals, Blue Streak Duncan was the wolf; and they stood, restless, surly, yet sullenly respectful before their master.

Spike Haney was in a quandary. It would be fatal to allow Blue to take Lucas: the wrangler would promptly revenge himself by telling everything he knew, which was plenty; he would try to save his own neck by putting those of the rest of the gang in a noose. But, on the other hand, even with thirty or forty men at his back, Haney didn't dare to refuse, point blank. Those big, black-butted guns that had already taken such terrible toll of the band were in their holsters; but Haney had witnessed the eye-defying speed with which they could be drawn. He played for time, hoping that Twist Morgan or Bart Willoughby himself would put in an appearance and help him out.

"That's all right, Duncan," he said, in a tone that was meant to be propitiatory. "We ain't doubtin' yuh think yuh've got the straight of it; but they's been mistakes made afore this, an' the story Lucas tells don't fit in with yuhrs. Not meanin' any disrespect to you, how do we know he's been up to any such didoes?"

"There's a whole lot of ways yuh might know it, Haney; but yuh won't have to tire yuhr minds thinkin' em out. The only one yuh need to pay any attention to is that I'm tellin' yuh he did. That's all that's necessary."

Haney tried his best to sustain the gaze of those narrowed blue eyes—and failed. His own eyes wavered away and fell. He took a couple of shuffling steps backward.

"Well, now, I dunno, Duncan," he mumbled uncertainly. "The say ain't mine round here. I ain't doubtin' yuhr word, understand me; but I reckon 'fore yuh can do anything, yuh'll have to see the boss."

"The hell with the boss!" snapped Blue curtly. "What business is it of his? This is between this jasper an' me, an' I'm seein' nobody, *sabé?* Lucas, yuh're wastin' time there! Rattle yuhr spurs, hombre!"

With fingers that were visibly shaking, the terrified wrangler reluctantly pulled on his other boot. He wet his dry lips with his tongue and swallowed with an audible gulp. His head turned slowly from side to side in a mute appeal to the friends who were forsaking him.

The roomful of men shifted again uneasily. A low, growling murmur went up among them, like the soughing of wind through heavy branches. Then they settled back into their former sullen passivity. Killers all, cold-blooded, unscrupulous, it took a super-killer to inspire them with fear. They hated Blue Streak Duncan, but they cringed before him. That deadly reputation of his awed them into unwilling submission; his contemptuous arrogance was the only kind of language they understood. The glance of his hard, unwinking eyes seemed to hold them as if under a spell.

But no man, however great his fame, can look in more than one direction at the same time. Realization of this fact had dawned on Matt Wilson, standing just beyond the lamp at the far end of the room, and partly concealed behind a couple of his companions. His right arm was swathed to above the elbow in dirty, blood-stained bandages; but he could make shift to shoot with his left, and he was burning for revenge for the loss of his thumb and index finger. He was sure that Blue hadn't looked at him; or, if he had, that it had been to dismiss him as an unimportant factor, because of that helpless gunhand.

It was a chance to make a reputation for himself that would spread from one end of the country to the other. A wounded man cashing the chips of the notorious Blue Streak Duncan! Two fingers for the most famous life on the Border! Matt Wilson saw a roseate

vision of fame and fortune beckoning to him. Saw himself lording it over his fellows, the observed of all observers, pointed out, whispered about, extravagantly admired wherever he appeared. The chance of a lifetime!

And there seemed to be no risk attached to it. Duncan, a perfect target in the light from the doorway, had his attention fixed on Lucas and Spike Haney; and even should he turn suddenly, he wasn't likely to notice anything, because Abe Reece partly blocked his line of vision.

An unholy light shone in Matt Wilson's eyes. For the first time since Blue's bullets had sent him in shrieking flight from the mouth of the arroyo, he forgot the grinding pain of his wound. Stealthily, his hand crept toward his gun. He made no quick movement to attract attention, but slid his fingers surreptitiously forward to the holster on his thigh. He could almost have shouted aloud in triumph when they closed on the butt of the weapon, loosened it, cautiously drew it free of the leather. Another instant, and his revenge would be complete.

But for Matt Wilson that instant never came. A dart of coruscating flame blazed from Blue's hip, and the roar of the forty-five's report crashed out deafeningly in the confined space of the room. A dazed and foolish expression overspread the desperado's face. His legs sagged, buckled under him, and he went slowly down on his knees. He coughed once, and a scarlet stream poured from his lips, as he slumped limply forward and lay still, a shallow pool of his own blood sluggishly widening about his head on the grimy bunkhouse floor.

CHAPTER XVI

Bart Willoughby—Honest Rancher

HAD there been another man in the crowd who, like Matt Wilson, had scented a chance to make a name for himself, nothing could have prevented a general gunfight that would have turned the bunkhouse into a shambles. But only three or four had as yet buckled on their belts; and before they could recover from the shock of the swift fate that had overtaken their companion, Blue had stepped back against the wall, and was looking at them over the barrels of two leveled guns, from the muzzle of one of which a pungent wisp of smoke was still curling.

When he spoke, it was in a voice whose pitch and timbre had not changed in the slightest from its characteristic lazy drawl.

"I never did see anything to tie the way some folks go bullin' right along, never learnin' a thing until it's too late to do 'em any good," he observed. "Just like I told two-three of you fellers the other day, I don't know how yuh was ever allowed to grow up! Yuh try on one piece of monkey-business after another, an' yuh go about 'em in a way that wouldn't fool a blind old lady back East! Hell's smoke-stack! I'm beginnin' to believe the things I've heard about this outfit is all wrong, I am so. Why, they ain't nothin' bad about yuh but yuhr intentions! Yuh best take my advice, hombres, an' quit packin' any hardware; all it ever does for yuh is get yuh into trouble!"

There was no stirring in the room now, no muttering. The slow, pleasant voice barbed the insult of the words, but the smile, insolent, derisive and indicative of the supreme contempt in which he held them all, was more deadly than any glare of hate. Before their eyes he had proved his right to his name and reputation; yet his personality was more terrible than all the tales that had been told about him. The day was to come when men who had stood silent and cowed in the bunkhouse of the Double Box Circle that misty morning would recount to spellbound audiences in far distant places the story of how Blue Streak Duncan had shot and killed a man without even turning to look at him!

And they would believe it, too, not

knowing that Blue's first glance about the crowded, lamp-lit room had shown him which of the band had already put on their gunbelts and must, therefore, be watched most closely. He had been expecting and waiting for the very move that Matt Wilson had made, and had anticipated the outlaw's purpose even before it had taken definite form in the fellow's own slower-acting mind.

"If yuh've got them boots on at last, Lucas, we'll just be driftin' along," he said evenly. "But first, they's somebody comin' that'll mebbe want to say adios to yuh. Yuh've got a little piece of money comin', too, I reckon — not that yuh'll have much chance to spend it where yuh're goin'."

A kind of slow shudder went over the wrangler, but he did not lift his eyes. His mouth was working spasmodically.

"An' mebbe yuh ain't really entitled to draw it, account of fallin' down on the job yuh was hired to do. Still, yuh sure done yuhr best to earn it — I'm here to certify that—an' they wouldn't anybody but a cheap skate hold out on yuh 'cause yuh didn't quite put it over. We'll just wait an' see what Mr. Willoughby thinks about it, shall we, huh? I wouldn't wonder if this was him comin' now."

Blue's quick eyes, that seemed to be here, there, and everywhere, had caught sight of the tall, stockily-built figure of the outlaw chief hurriedly approaching across the yard. Without letting his gaze waver for a second away from the sullen pack before him, he stepped to one side of the door. Willoughby strode up the steps and was inside the room before he was aware of any alien presence. Quarrels were far from being unknown among the members of his band. More often than not, they terminated in bloodshed, and it was usually necessary for him or Twist Morgan to take a hand and quell the disturbance. Just at this particular time, he was especially anxious for harmony to prevail in the bunkhouse. He had heard the report of a gun and had promptly come out to put a stop to the trouble, if any, before it spread.

"What in hell's goin' on here?" he demanded harshly. "Who—"

"Just me, Mr. Willoughby," Blue's voice drawled at his albow.

Like a flash, Willoughby swung about; but at sight of the gray-clad figure with the two leveled guns, his hand caught itself midway in the swift swoop it had started toward his hip. A flicker of consternation blinked in his beady little black eyes.

"Just me, Mr. Willoughby," Blue repeated gently. "My name's Duncan. I disremember our ever havin' met up before, but I reckon we've heard tell of each other."

"Yeah; I reckon we have," nodded Willoughby. Already he had recovered his poise. After that first almost imperceptible start, when he had recognized the visitor, his dark-skinned, saturnine face was as blankly expressionless as Blue's own. "I'd like to say I'm proud to make yuhr acquaintance, Mr. Duncan; but yuh won't hold it against me, will yuh, if I ask yuh first what in merry hell yuh're doin' in my bunkhouse?"

"I sure won't, Mr. Willoughby!" Blue nodded amiably, and, with smiling nonchalance, slid both guns back into their holsters. "I chased a skunk in here, and waltzed in after him to haze him out. I explained to these fellers of yuhrs, but Matt Wilson, he either didn't get me right or else he wasn't particular about smells—I dunno which. Anyways, he moved out of turn, an' I had to call him."

"Yuh're unravelin' a lot of words, but suppose yuh use a few that'll explain what business yuh've got on the Double Box Circle a-tall? Ain't you the feller that rode in here the other day an' started a ruckus with my foreman?"

Blue's grin was the apotheosis of boyish good humor.

"Why, yes—an' no, Mr. Willoughby," he drawled. "I'm the feller that rode in here, all right, but I didn't

start any ruckus; I only finished it. I don't know just what to make of this bunch yuh've got ridin' for yuh, Mr. Willoughby," he added earnestly. "Seems every time I run across any of 'em, they start something they can't finish, an' wind up by gettin' hurt. Wouldn't yuh think they'd learn? I've heard tell that even a buck sheep will stop buttin' a rock after his head gets sore enough."

"An' I've heard tell that even a bleatin' ewe will stop workin' her jaw after she gets tired chewin'," Willoughby matched the impudence, neatly enough. He could not but admire Blue's superbly insulting bravado in sheathing both guns; but he did not make the mistake of thinking that because the weapons were in their holsters, he could afford to let his hands move anywhere near his own. "For the third time, Duncan, I'm askin' yuh for a straight answer. What are you doing here on my ranch?"

"All right, Mr. Willoughby!" Drawl and lazily mocking smile disappeared altogether; the air of the room seemed suddenly to crackle with electric tension, as Blue's challenge rapped out, crisp and short. "All right, Mr. Willoughby! Yuh want a straight answer; I'll give it to yuh. That dirty dog, Lucas, tried to burn down the Caldwell ranch house this mornin'. I caught him settin' the fire, an' chased him in here. I'm takin' him out again, an' I'm doin' it right now. Yuh got any objections?"

In the strained silence that followed, the hoarse, uneven breathing of the wretched horse-wrangler was plainly audible. His mouth was sagging loosely open, and he was staring at the two grim antagonists who confronted each other there in the doorway, with a look of animal-like terror on his face.

When Willoughby spoke, it was very slowly and distinctly, and in a tone loud enough to carry to the ears of every man in the room.

"I don't have to answer that question, Duncan, an' you know it. If the Double Box Circle wasn't an honest ranch, yuh wouldn't have lived long enough to ask it!"

Blue nodded, his tight lips relaxing a little to show a gleam of white, even teeth.

"Now, that," he remarked, "is just about what I was expectin' yuh'd say, Mr. Willoughby. I'd bet my saddle yuh wasn't ready to have folks think yuh'd give shelter to a lousy skunk like Lucas!"

It was a speech that could be interpreted in two ways, of course, and the irony of its double meaning, although over the heads of the men, was not lost on Willoughby. He couldn't be quite sure whether or not Blue's phrasing had been deliberate; but the truth happened to be that he wasn't "ready." Powerful he was, but not yet powerful enough openly to acknowledge his crimes and defy all punishment. If he boldly protected the wrangler, in the face of the atrocious nature of the crime in which the latter had been detected, every decent person in the country would rise against him; the "army" would be recruited over night, and he and his band would inevitably be destroyed.

Blue had understood this and had gambled heavily on it. He believed that Willoughby would not dare to prevent his taking Lucas. With a curt movement of his head, he motioned to the latter to come forward. For a moment, however, the wrangler made no effort to rise from the edge of the bunk where he was still sitting. Bewildered and dismayed, he couldn't seem to grasp the fact that he was being abandoned to his fate.

The other men, too, were incredulous, resentful. Ugly, rebellious looks were cast at their leader. Not that any of them cared a snap of his fingers what became of Aleck Lucas; but who could tell whose turn it might be next? And if Willoughby would let one of them down this way. . . .

They stared at him; Lucas stared at him, as if waiting for some word, some sign. And they got it. Willoughby

stood glowering darkly at the wrangler; but the little beady black eyes darted one swift, significant look about the room; a look that was scarcely more than the flicker of a drooped lid, but that conveyed a whole world of meaning. Lucas lowered his own eyes, to veil the triumphant gleam within them. Then he stood up, and with head drooped forward on his breast, shuffled over toward the door.

"That's right," Blue said. "Now, we'll just mosey out to the corral an' catch up that hawss Mr. Willoughby's goin' to oblige me by lendin' yuh."

"What's the matter with—" Willoughby was beginning, when a warning scowl from Spike Haney cautioned him not to put that particular query. He had been about to ask what was the matter with Lucas' own horse; but Haney knew, as he did not, that the animal the L Bar C man had ridden had belonged to Sim Nicholls and bore Willoughby's own brand. With admirable presence of mind, Willoughby changed his sentence in the middle, saying: "What's the matter with—my havin' one brought round, Duncan? Abe, go fetch Matt Wilson's gray. Matt, he won't be ridin' except mebbe on something with four wheels, instead of legs."

"Thanks," nodded Blue, and suppressed a grin. "I'll send him back to yuh, Mr. Willoughby. Now, we'll be movin' right along, I reckon; it's gettin' late, an' Mr. Caldwell'll be wantin' to know has this jasper been took care of."

"Hold on a minute, Duncan! What are yuh aimin' to do with him?"

"Stick him in the jail down to Three Buttes an' see to it that he stays there until he faces a jury."

Again there was that swift flicker of the beady black eyes. Willoughby said, with elaborate gravity:

"I'm a law-abidin' man, Duncan, an' nothin's been proved against this feller. They won't be no lynchin'?"

"No, Mr. Willoughby; they won't be no lynchin'."

"All right; I'm satisfied! An' if yuh'd come to me in the first place, an' told me what he done, yuh could've had him without bustin' in an' stirrin' up a row in my bunkhouse!"

Blue whistled for Powder, swung into the saddle.

"Far as that goes, Mr. Willoughby, we all have our own ways of doing things. When I hear a sidewinder rattlin' the grass, I'm goin' to step on his neck pronto, an' I'm not stoppin' to ask anybody for permission! . . . Get goin', Lucas!"

The *clip-clop, clip-clop* of their horses' hoofs was the only sound that marked their departure from the yard. Blue knew that half a hundred pairs of hostile eyes were watching them as they went, that half a hundred trigger-fingers were itching to send a bullet into his back. But he felt no very serious misgivings. He did not believe that he would be shot, in the back or any other way, so long as he was on Double Box Circle land: Bart Willoughby would see to it that he wasn't!

But the look that had quelled the smolder of rebellion in the bunkhouse had not escaped him. For reasons of diplomacy, Willoughby had been compelled to accede to his demand for the surrender of Lucas, pretending abhorrence of both crime and criminal; but the crafty, unscrupulous mind of the outlaw chief had already determined on the next move in the villainous game he was playing. Unless Blue were very much mistaken, the treacherous wrangler, Lucas, would never face a jury in Three Buttes—or anywhere else. Bart Willoughby would see to that, too!

CHAPTER XVII

At the Jail

EXACTLY how Willoughby intended to go to work to prevent it, however, was a matter about which Blue wasted no time in speculating. Later on, he would have ample leisure to think it over and consider it in de-

tail; but, just now, minutes might be precious, and it was up to him to lodge his prisoner safely behind bars with all possible expedition.

It was rough going on the canyon road, but he forced the pace, urging the horses to top speed. About a mile away from the Double Box Circle ranch house, he called a halt long enough to lash the wrangler's wrists together with a strip of rawhide cut from his lariat, and to attach a leading rope to the gray's bridle. He didn't believe that Lucas would be fool enough to try to bolt, with the virtual certainty of stopping lead for his pains, but there was no use in taking unnecessary chances. He didn't want to have to shoot the fellow; that would be playing directly into Bart Willoughby's hands. There was no doubt whatever that Willoughby had hired Lucas to burn the Caldwell house, and Blue was determined that Lucas should live long enough to confess publicly to the facts of the abominable bargain.

All the way to Three Buttes, he kept a sharp lookout for signs of pursuit, but none developed, and he rode into town with his prisoner without having been interfered with in any way.

But it was at once evident that the news of the attempted outrage at the Caldwell ranch had preceded them. There were a good many people in the streets, and excited, gesticulating groups were gathered at the corners and outside the saloons. Lucas began to exhibit fresh symptoms of fear.

"Remember, Duncan, yuh passed yuhr word to Bart that they wouldn't no harm come to me," he whined. "Yuh've got to look after me, Duncan. It's all a mistake, anyways. I kin explain—"

"Shut yuhr mouth!" snapped Blue. "An' keep it shut, hear me? The only mistake was in my not drillin' yuh the minute I saw yuh strike that match!"

"But yuh passed yuhr word I was just goin' to jail, Duncan! Yuh ain't goin' to let none of them fellers hurt me? Yuh wouldn't let 'em take me, would yuh, Duncan, not after yuhr promisin' Bart? Duncan—"

Blue eyed him with icy disgust.

"Yuh're a fine sweet-scented polecat, you are!" he said. "Hell's smokestack! If yuh'd got the half of what yuh deserve, yuh'd be staked out on a ant-hill in the sun this minute, with molasses rubbed in yuhr hair! An', at that, I believe yuh'd turn a self-respectin' insect's stomach! Now, just one more yip outa yuh, an' I'm liable to forget what I told yuhr boss up there an' turn yuh over to the first man that's got a rope ready!"

The threat was one which, of course, he had no intention whatever of carrying out; but it had the desired effect. Lucas cringed and shivered, but, thereafter, he kept silence; and Blue, avoiding the main street, hurried him by way of back roads and alleys to the small dingy adobe structure which housed the jail.

There was no chance of their reaching it without attracting attention, however; Powder and his rider were by this time far too well known to escape recognition. The word was passed that Blue Streak Duncan had brought in Aleck Lucas, and a crowd of grim-faced men was soon milling about the jail. Fists were shaken and guns brandished; angry citizens loudly voiced their conviction that the prisoner ought to be strung up to a limb of the nearest tree; but there the demonstration against Lucas stopped.

The crowd was hostile enough, but it was without a leader, and Blue rode serenely indifferent to the threats that were freely hurled from all sides. What did arouse and fix his interest, though, was a glimpse he caught of Spike Haney and another of Willoughby's men whose name he did not know, hovering on the outskirts. He thought, too, that the man called Abe Reece was with them, but he could not be sure.

Still, it was enough that Haney had been in the Double Box Circle bunkhouse when he and Lucas had ridden away from it, and neither Haney nor

anyone else from the outfit had passed him on his way into town: he was as certain of that as he had ever been of anything in his life! The presence of the three here, then, meant that they must have traveled by another and much shorter route—without doubt, by way of the secret trail which Happy Stone had declared existed, and for which he had unsuccessfully searched. Well, Happy had been right; the trail did exist, no question about it now. Haney and his companions had assuredly used it, otherwise, they couldn't possibly have been in Three Buttes!

They kept well in the background; apparently, they merely wanted the prisoner to know that they were there—a sort of committee of reassurance.

"So's he won't lose his nerve an' spill something!" Blue told himself, as the crowd about the jail steps reluctantly parted to let Powder and the gray pass through. And Aleck Lucas certainly needed something to bolster his courage! His face was bleached to the whiteness of chalk, and he cowered between Blue and the railing, as he stumbled, gasping, up the steps. Probably no criminal had ever been so glad to see the inside of a jail as was he!

But if he breathed a sigh of heartfelt relief when the barred door of his narrow cell was shut behind him and the key turned in the lock, the town marshal was anything but gratified at the prospect of shouldering the responsibility for him. Across the scarred and battered oak desk that was used by the sheriff, when the county could boats such an official, Jake Tompkins regarded Blue with as much displeasure as he dared to exhibit. He had been sadly disappointed in the two-gun fighter, and had difficulty in dissembling his feelings.

"That there Number Two cell ain't been cleaned for a long time," he said, "but I reckon somethin'll sure have to be done about it after *he* gets out. Likely we'll have to fumigate the whole place 'fore we dast to use it again for humans. Why yuh had to go an' fetch such a lousy, crawlin' carcass to a white man's jail, when they's plenty o' buzzards goin' too hungry to be partic'lar, plumb beats *my* time, Duncan!"

Blue fished his sack of Durham and a squashed packet of brown papers from the pocket of his vest, and rolled himself a cigarette.

"Well," he said, "I dunno as a dead skunk smells any nicer than a live one. He didn't put up any fight; all he done was stick his tail betwixt his legs an' whine. Yuh didn't expect I was goin' to put a window in his back whiles I was fetchin' him down here, did yuh, Tompkins?"

"No; o' course not. But yuh'd have had a right to plug him if he'd tried to escape, just the same."

"Sure I would," Blue agreed, dropping into a rickety wooden chair and tilting it back against the wall. "But he didn't try."

The marshal snorted.

"No—an' I bet yuh never even gave him a chance, neither! Some folks never looks ahead," he averred gloomily. "Now I got a high, wide, an' pretty mess on my hands, ain't I?"

Blue elevated his eyebrows inquiringly.

"Meanin'—?" he drawled.

"Why, everybody in the whole dang county knows what he was fixin' to do last night, an' they's a bunch of hell-roarers in town right now that'd rather hoist him to the limb of a tree than eat dinner. Just s'pose some of 'em makes up their minds that his neck needs a good thorough stretchin', an' starts out to tend to it? Where'll I get off at with that Willoughby crowd, huh? How'd I stand with 'em, I'd like to know?"

Blue shrugged and flicked the ash from his cigarette.

"I don't just see why yuh should give a happy damn where yuh stand with that gang of reptiles," he said. "But if yuh're really worried at the idea of mebbe losin' their love an' gen-

tle devotion, it looks to me like all yuh have to do is see to it that yuhr bunch of hell-roarers stays on the outside, lookin' in. That's plumb simple.

"Oh, yeah? Is it? An' if they'd made up their minds they was comin' in, just how would yuh figure to go about keepin' 'em out, if you was me, Duncan?"

Blue shrugged again, blew out a little cloud of smoke.

"Oh, I dunno," he returned carelessly. "Reason with 'em, I reckon."

"Reason with 'em?" The marshal's emotion threatened to overcome him entirely. "*Reason* with 'em, you say? With twenty-thirty fellers that knows how nigh old man Caldwell come to be-in' fired to a crisp in his bed? An' that good-lookin' little daughter of his—say, she's pretty well liked in these parts, lemme tell yuh, Duncan! It wouldn't need more'n two words, said in the right place, an' they'd take that cuss apart with their bare hands to see how he got thataway! Lemme tell yuh!"

"All right, Tompkins; I believe yuh they would. But what are you goin' to be doin' whiles they're at it?"

"Who? Me?" demanded the marshal. "Nothin'!" What would I do? Sling lead at a lot of decent fellers—an' mebbe hurt some of 'em bad—just to protect a mangy yeller cur that needs killin' the worst way anyhow? No, sir-ee, sir; I ain't havin' none of that in mine!"

"But ain't it yuhr job to protect him?" inquired Blue. He understood the marshal's dilemma perfectly, and, to a certain extent, sympathized with the perturbed and worried man; but, at the same time, he had scant patience with that sort of argument. An oath was an oath; and a man who hadn't the guts to abide by it, had no business to take it in the first place. "Isn't that what yuh're paid to do?"

"Not by a damn sight, it ain't. That is, understand me, Duncan, I ain't hired to perform no miracles, an' I ain't paid to commit suicide, neither. If them fellers makes up their minds they're goin' to bust in here an' snake Lucas out, then they'll sure bust in an' snake him out, that's all! There's just one thing that'd stop 'em, an' it ain't Jake Tompkins. It's their remember-in' how thick he's been with Abe Reece an' Sim Nicholls an' some of them other tough hombres that's workin' for Willoughby. They'll mebbe think twice afore they try to pull off anything that'll land 'em in a ruckus with Bart's crowd."

This thought seemed to cheer the marshal a little. The pall of gloom on his round face began to lighten.

"Uh-huh," he repeated, nodding slowly to himself, "they'll mebbe think twice about that. They know they dasn't monkey with anybody stands in strong with the Double Box Circle. They'll get likkered up, an' high-tail it around an' do a lot of yellin' an' tall talkin', but that's all it'll amount to. I don't reckon I got nothin' much to worry about, after all, Duncan."

Blue flipped the stub of his cigarette into the battered tin cuspidor that stood by the desk, and got up.

"That bein' the case," he said, "I'll sift along downtown; I'm shy a lot of ham an' eggs. Willoughby didn't ask me to stop an' put on no feed-bag. He acted as if he was a mite upset over something, an' I didn't like to remind him that it was pretty near breakfast time."

"I wisht I could go with yuh, Duncan. I've had breakfast, o' course, hours ago, but I could eat some more, an' I'd like mighty well to hear which way the wind's blowin'. Down to the Wide Awake, for instance—"

"The Wide Awake? I though yuh closed that up."

"I did. But I let 'em open again. I couldn't take Schmidt's livin' away from him, an' they won't be no more trouble there. Schmidt, he give me his word."

"Yeah? An' what else?"

Either Tompkins didn't understand, or he affected not to. He went on:

"If I just had a good dep'ty or two I could leave in charge here, I'd ride along with yuh, Duncan, an'—"

Blue turned back from the doorway.

"No, yuh wouldn't, Tompkins," he said very quietly. "If yuh had a dozen deputies, yuh'd stay right here an' see to it that Lucas doesn't get out an' nobody else gets in until I come back! I've turned that jasper over to you as an officer of the law, an' yuh're responsible for him to the town—*an' to me!* Just don't make no mistake about that, or they'll be a new occupant in yuhr family buryin' plot, pronto! *Sabé?*"

He waited for no reply, but strode out, leaving the unhappy Tompkins to the consolation of Aleck Lucas and his own not too agreeable reflections.

CHAPTER XVIII

Another Angle on the Plot

LEADING the borrowed gray, Blue rode around to the livery stable at the other end of the town. It bore the name of the Best Ever Corral, and consisted simply of a long, ramshackle shed, roofed over at the front, with a double row of open stalls at the back. The rear of the sandy, refuse-littered lot on which it stood abutted on the main street only a short distance from the eating house opposite the Wide Awake.

Having seen to it that both the horses were properly cared for, Blue started up the street on foot. Just as he was passing the neat building of the Three Buttes Bank and Trust Company, he saw Luke Caldwell galloping in from the direction of the ranch, and stopped to hail him.

"Duncan! Well, I certainly am glad to see you!" The rancher swung to the ground and grasped the younger man's hand, shaking it warmly. "I've been worried half out of my wits about you. What happened? Did you catch Lucas?"

Blue nodded.

"Uh-huh. Just left him up to the jail."

"You overtook him before he got to Willoughby's, then? Or wasn't he going there, after all?"

"Oh, sure, he went there. I went after him an' hazed him out again."

"Not without a fight?"

"Well, it wasn't what yuh'd call a fight, exactly," said Blue. "Some of the men didn't act just friendly, an' Matt Wilson took one too many chances on me bein' stone blind; but soon as Bart Willoughby showed up an' found out what I wanted Lucas for, everything went along just as smooth as an old maid's knittin'. A square, upstandin' man like Mr. Willoughby"—he grinned whimsically at Caldwell—"would naturally be plumb anxious to do everything he could to see to it that cuss got all that was comin' to him. All he wanted was to be sure they wouldn't be no lynchin'—that we was goin' to do things accordin' to law an' order."

Caldwell stared in some mystification.

"All he wanted was to be sure—Say, Duncan, what—"

"Never mind it now; come on in whiles I eat a combination breakfast an' dinner. We can talk over the table. How's Bill this mornin'?"

"About a hundred per cent better, but pretty weak yet. He was all for riding in with me to find out what had become of you. Swore he was all right and wasn't going to be treated like a baby. Marshall and I couldn't do a thing with him, so I called Louise in, and she put her foot down. But when I left, Bill was still arguing about it."

"Yeah—he would be!" said Blue. "Yuh'd think that little red-headed runt'd seen fightin' enough to last him for awhile, wouldn't yuh? But he ain't no sooner out of one ruckus than he's inquirin' around to see mebbe ain't there another goin' on somewheres that he can get into. It's high time he got married an' commenced to behave himself!" He turned into the restaurant, and Luke Caldwell dropped reins over the hitch-rack and followed him.

The waiter was delighted to see Blue again. He hurried forward to dust off a table, place chairs, and, in general, comport himself as though the President of the United States had dropped in for a meal. He alternated in voluble praise of Blue and denunciation of Aleck Lucas, who, he declared, was so snake-belly low that killing was too good for him.

"Some of the fellers in here this mornin' was sayin' that he ought to be buried alive, wasn't it that he'd pollute clean ground! They claim they're goin' to burn the rope when they've strung him up, 'cause it wouldn't never be fit for nobody to touch after it'd been round his neck! I been in this town a good long while, Mr. Duncan, an' I ain't never seen anythin' like the feelin' they is against that hombre."

"That so, George?" Blue reached for the sugar bowl.

"It sure is! Why, Mr. Duncan—" The waiter interrupted himself to bawl at the cook who was so busy listening at the kitchen door that he had forgotten to attend to the order, and then, leaning confidentially over Blue's chair, went on: "Why, Mr. Duncan, even the Willoughby crowd are all for makin' an example of him that nobody won't forget for a while."

Across the table, Blue's eyes sent a swift, significant look at Luke Caldwell. So the Willoughby crowd were talking about making an example of one of their own men, were they? That was an interesting piece of news!

"Yuh surprise me, George!" he drawled. "I'd 've thought there was enough examples among them jaspers already without their makin' any more!"

"Well, o' course—" George hesitated, glanced around, then bent still lower, speaking almost in a whipser, although there was no one else in the room. "Well, o' course, Mr. Duncan, I wouldn't want it to get out that I said so, but me an' you, we know they're a pretty hard lot. If they's two sides to a thing, they're most generally on the wrong one, an' any feller gives 'em any back chat had better be ready to say good-by to hisself. But this business of tryin' to burn a house with a woman in it's different. Ain't none of 'em could go that, Mr. Duncan. Oh, I heard what they was sayin', all right."

"Did yuh so, George? An' who was sayin' it?"

"Well, they was in here a while ago; Spike Haney an' Abe Reece an' a big, heavy-set feller they call 'Slats'—"

"Slats Kelly, you mean?" interjected Luke Caldwell. "Man with curly black hair, must weigh close to two hundred and fifty pounds?"

"That's the feller, Mr. Caldwell. He had dinner here with Twist Morgan, the foreman. The other three come in, but they didn't eat. There was half a dozen boys from the Lazy L an' the Bar Ten, an' some other gents, an' they was talkin' mighty high. Twist Morgan, him an' Haney listened to me to be het up even more'n the cowpokes. Why, Haney an' Slats, they got into a argument 'bout which of 'em was goin' to take the first crack at Lucas! Oh, they're sore, all right, Mr. Duncan! The jail ain't been built yet that they wouldn't haul that dirty murderer out of!"

A shout from the cook just then took the waiter into the kitchen on the run. Blue leaned quickly toward Luke Caldwell, his eyes snapping with excitement.

"It's all plain as that these here eggs has been orphans a long time," he said rapidly. "All this lynchin' talk from Willoughby's gang means they're fixin' up a rescue party for Lucas! They'll get a bunch of decent folks to bust open the jail, an' then, durin' the muss, Lucas'll get away!"

"You think Tompkins won't put up a fight, then?" asked the rancher anxiously.

"I think he'd a dang sight rather he didn't have to! But, the point is, Mr. Caldwell, that there's sure goin' to be one; an' whiles it's goin' on, some-

body's liable to get hurt. We don't want it to be anyone that'll be missed in Three Buttes! You get around an' see as many folks as yuh can—steer 'em off this necktie party. Tell all yuhr friends to stay out of it—explain to 'em that we're needin' Lucas in our business, an' that a feller who's had his neck broke makes a damn poor witness. Understand?"

Caldwell did, and hurried off at once, after arranging to meet Blue and report progress later in the day. The younger man went on with his meal, chuckling sardonically to himself over the cunning coup that the Double Box Circle was planning.

It was, of course, perfectly obvious that all their talk against Lucas was pure camouflage. Blue had thought for a moment that perhaps the wrangler knew so much that it had been considered necessary to serve him as Tuffy Ferguson had been served. A little reflection, however, had convinced him that the cases were not parallel. Ferguson had been shot by his own friends because he was looked upon as a traitor. But if Lucas were killed, after his chief had promised to protect him, then Bart Willoughby himself would be the traitor in the eyes of his men. However ready and eager he might be to sacrifice the wrangler, he had been warned, by what had happened in the bunkhouse, that such an action would bring about a mutiny in his band. And he could afford that no more than he could afford to have Lucas make a confession.

It appeared to be quite clear, then, that if Twist Morgan, Spike Haney, and other members of the gang were loudly insisting that Lucas be strung up, they were doing so for a double purpose: to disavow him publicly by a show of spurious rage against him, and to arrange an opportunity for him to effect his escape from the clutches of the law. Stir up sentiment against him until it reached the boiling point. Then let the crowd of angry cowboys and townspeople storm the jail—and, incidentally, absorb any stray slugs that the marshal might perhaps consider it his duty to turn loose. And then pitch in and create a grand hullabaloo, so that, in the ensuing confusion, the prisoner could be spirited away to a place of safety!

With characteristic guile, Willoughby was planning to use his enemies as a cat's-paw for a job in which he did not dare to take an open part. All unsuspecting, they would turn the trick for him, and he would emerge triumphant, as usual, unless a counterplay could be made to checkmate him. The first move that had suggested itself to Blue was the idea of having Luke Caldwell dissuade responsible citizens from unwittingly playing the outlaw chieftain's game for him; but that was only the beginning. A good deal more would have to be done, and Blue was thoughtfully considering his own plans, the while he lent a careful ear to the waiter's talk, hoping that he might pick up some additional information from it.

Not until he had finished his meal and was paying his bill, however, did he glean anything of further interest. Then, all at once, a casual remark of George's fired his attention, like a blow of flint on steel, striking a hot, bright spark.

"What was that, George?" he demanded quickly. "What was it Twist Morgan said?"

The waiter had retailed everything that he could remember, swelling with pride meanwhile that he should have the ear of such a famous personage as Blue Streak Duncan. The speech of the Double Box Circle foreman which he had just quoted did not seem to him to be of any more importance than the rest of the conversation; but he obligingly repeated it.

"Why, he says to Slats Kelly, just when they was startin' out together, he says, 'I'm goin' over to Schmidt's place now,' he says; 'you an' Abe an' Spike sift into the Oasis, an' get busy. We want to have every damn man in

town up at that jail tonight,' he says. Yuh see, Mr. Duncan, it's just like I told yuh; they's things even them fellers can't swallow."

"Yeah," murmured Blue, eyes half closed, and a far-away look on his face. "An' they's things I can't swallow, either, George; they don't get even halfway down before they stick!"

He didn't attempt to explain what he meant. George was a good fellow, but he did like to listen to the sound of his own voice, and the Willoughby gang had him completely buffaloed. Much better, then, to put no notion into his head that would complicate matters if some of them pumped it out again!

But his garrulous efforts to demonstrate that the Double Box Circle crew had been seized with a paroxysm of virtue had certainly given Blue something to think about! "We want to have every damn man in town up at that jail tonight," George quoted Twist Morgan as having said. What for? Having a big crowd around would only make it more difficult for friends of Lucas to arrange for his getaway. Darkness was going to be a prime factor in their scheme, of course, and the larger the mob, the more torches there would be, and the less the chances of keeping a safe avenue of escape open.

Then what was the big idea? Was there another angle to the situation that he hadn't considered? There must be! Willoughby was undoubtedly figuring on pulling off a double-barreled coup: to rescue Lucas, and at the same time, by concentrating the attention of everyone in town on the jail, to leave the way clear for—what? A final determined attempt to dispose of Luke Caldwell and Happy Bill Stone? —perhaps an attack in force on the ranch?

The more Blue pondered it, the more certain it seemed to him that some such diabolical scheme must be in the wind. Just how anything of the sort was to be engineered, though, puzzled him not a little, for he was aware that the last thing in the world Bart Willoughby desired was to be seen in his true colors. If a serious attack against the Caldwell ranch were actually in contemplation, how disguise the part of the Double Box Circle in it? It wasn't a question of a leader and three or four unscrupulous men. The L Bar C was a good-sized outfit, employing quite a number of hands, and Willoughby would need every gun he could muster.

It wasn't likely that they'd all assemble in town, either. There'd be just enough of them to handle the business of the jail delivery, and the rest would gather in some place from which they could count on making a swift and successful sortie. The Big Wash below Black Top, in all probability. They would appear like shadows, do their deadly work, and, like shadows, vanish again. That must be the answer. At least, it was the only answer of which Blue could think just then. It seemed to take care of all the pieces in the puzzle, and it was pretty fairly plausible, besides.

But Blue wasn't satisfied with it, just the same. He might have reasoned it out correctly, but— A nagging little doubt kept obtruding itself irritatingly, and he was annoyed because he was unable to resolve it. Well, he'd have to get hold of Luke Caldwell, send him back to the ranch, and have him warn Happy and the boys to be on the job every minute, watching out for trouble. Meanwhile, it wouldn't do any harm to give the town the once-over, and see how many of the bad hats were in evidence. He'd noticed quite a few of them mingling with the crowd in the streets as he rode down from the jail, and George had told him that Twist Morgan had gone over to the Wide Awake only a short time before. Might not be a bad idea to look in there at the Oasis, and see what was going on.

He said good-by to the friendly waiter and walked slowly over to the

door, where he rolled a cigarette and stood for a moment in a brown study. There was something—some clue that eluded him. If only he could put his finger on it, he'd have the whole explanation. "We want to have every damn man in town up at that jail tonight. . . ."

Still preoccupied with his own thoughts, wrestling with that nagging little doubt, he opened the door and stepped out onto the narrow board sidewalk, from force of habit casting a searching glance up and down the dusty street. A moment before, it had been a-hum with sound; a score or more of people had been visible from the door of the eating house. Now, it was almost deserted, oppressively, ominously still. Blue came out of his abstraction with a jerk, every faculty alert, his nerves suddenly thrilling with a premonitory sense of impending danger. His muscles tensed; once more his keen gaze darted back and forth, sweepingly.

The westering sun, dipping toward the horizon, slanted down over the low roof of the building opposite, and sent a blinding shaft of light straight into his eyes. He blinked in the bewildering dazzle, half raised his hand to shield them. It was then that a crouching figure moved swiftly in the shadows of the alley next to the saloon.

Blue had no time to dodge or duck back into the doorway. He acted instinctively and with lightning swiftness. Forward and down he hurled himself, plunging at full length in the thick yellow dust of the road, while the stillness seemed to explode with a flaming roar that drummed to a savage, crashing crescendo, and then, abruptly, shuddered into silence.

A hundred yards away, a solitary rider stiffened in his saddle at the first burst of sound. He drove spurs deep into his horse's flanks, and thundered up the street at a mad gallop. In a swirl of dust, he flung from the saddle, hobbled a couple of steps, and crouched over Blue's prostrate body, face set, eyes blazing with fury and fierce defiance, as they stabbed here and there, the swinging muzzle of his six-gun following their swooping, steady dart.

The hard, bright glare of the brilliant sunlight streamed full upon him. No hidden assassin, luring in a darkened doorway or watching from the angle of a building, could have asked for a better target.

(Does Willoughby intend that Blue shall be put out of the way before nightfall? Will he wipe out Caldwell's outfit during the fake lynching he has planned? Find out what happens in the next instalment.)

Don't Miss

THE LAST SHOT

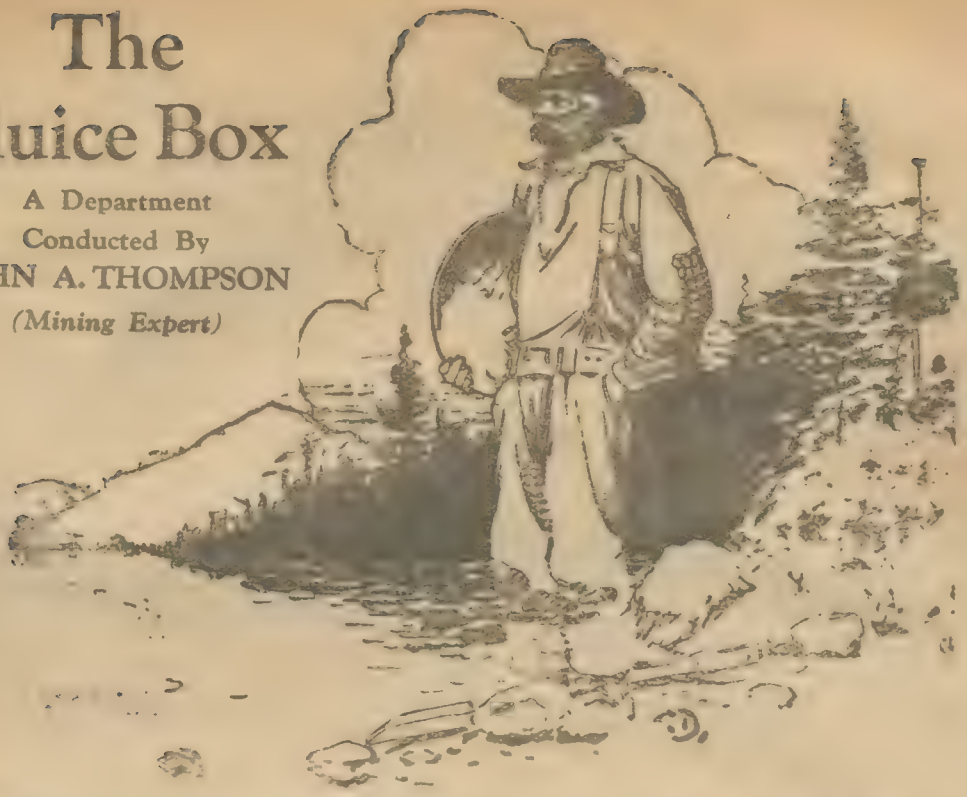
By CAPTAIN R. E. DUPUY

A Bull's-eye Yarn of Adventure in China.

In the First March Issue—On Sale, February 6th.

The Sluice Box

A Department
Conducted By
JOHN A. THOMPSON
(Mining Expert)



THIS department is intended to be of real interest and practical assistance to all readers of ACE-HIGH MAGAZINE. It is conducted by the well-known John A. Thompson, mining expert. In each issue will be published some interesting facts concerning the various phases of prospecting and mining, based on John A. Thompson's many years of actual experience in the West and in Alaska. Prospecting problems and procedure will be discussed regularly. Also, questions relating to mining laws, field conditions, new and old mining territories, and so forth, will be answered in this department. If you wish a personal answer, enclose a stamped, self-addressed envelope with your question. Address all questions to John A. Thompson, Mining Expert, care of ACE-HIGH MAGAZINE, 80 Lafayette St., New York, N. Y.

No. 68. King Coal (1)

ANYONE under the impression that coal is just some dirty black stuff to be thrown into the kitchen stove, or shovelled into the furnace on a raw winter's day, has another guess coming. Coal is a key mineral—one of the most important minerals in the world today. Happy is the nation with a coal reserve within her boundaries.

Industrial barons study the coal situation. Economists stay awake nights pondering the problem. Statesmen grow gray before their time worrying about coal. In coal the geologist reads a fascinating chapter of the earth's early history. Hand a chemist a piece of coal. He can do amazing tricks with it. Let him take it into his laboratory, treat it in crucible and retort. Out of the smudgy black rock Mr. Chemist will produce for you beautiful dyes, antiseptics, explosives, material that can be used by the perfume manufacturers, and in fact the whole host of valuable so-called coal-tar products.

Verily, King Coal deserves the title. Yet strangely enough the paramount international importance of coal is due to its apparent indispensability in one essential modern business—steel making.

Fuel substitutes can be found for coal. Oil, for instance. Power plants can be designed to use electricity derived from harnessing the tremendous

horsepower energy of flowing water in streams and rivers. Housewives can cook with natural gas. But the steel industry needs coke. And coke is made from coal. Moreover no substitute, available in sufficient quantities, has yet been found.

The real international importance of coal reserves is not so much a question of fuel to fire battleships, most of which are oil-burning anyhow nowadays. It is vastly more vital. It is the question of having the coal to make the coke needed to make the steel out of which not only the battleships, but the guns as well, are manufactured that leaves King Coal literally sitting on top of the world in an age of steel.

Consider for a moment the times we live in without steel, and you have an idea of what would happen should the supply of coking coal be depleted before some substitute was discovered. No railroads, no steamships, no skyscrapers, no steel bridges, no machinery to manufacture things, no automobiles. Now, how about that dirty black stuff you throw into the kitchen stove? Is coal king, or isn't it? Boy, you said it! And approximately 600,000,000 tons of coal are mined a year in the United States.

Essentially coal is simply the altered remains of great prehistoric forests. Some coal beds show the imprints of the original wood cell structure. Coal beds were formed by the accumulation of rotting swamp vegetation that was protected from complete decay by the stagnant water. Later with the process of the ages, mud and clay covered up the black vegetable mass. It was buried. In time the earth's stresses squeezed some of the moisture out, the material was compressed, baked with the heat of enormous pressure . . . and coal was formed.

Peat bogs represent a stage in nature's alchemy concerned with the formation of coal. The slow process of making coal is still going on in many parts of the world, although the coal we use today was formed countless ages ago. Wherever there are flat, undrained sections of land covered with vegetation coal is in the making. The muskegs of the Great Lakes will be coal beds some day. So will the tundra covered Arctic plains.

There are several varieties or grades of coal. Lignite, for instance, is a brownish variety possessing a high moisture content. When freshly exposed it can often be cut into blocks with a spade. It dries rapidly and slacks or crumbles to a fine powder which takes fire easily by spontaneous combustion.

Sub-bituminous coal is black, shiny as jet as a rule. It has less moisture than lignite but it is also subject to easy crumbling and spontaneous combustion.

Bituminous coal is the normal soft coal of commerce. It burns with an oily, smoky flame, is apt to be blocky in character and ignite of its own accord if stored in bulk, or stored where it may be subject to much artificial heat.

Semi-bituminous is the so-called smokeless coal. It can be crumbled by hand but excels the other normal coals in heat unit values, and because of its low volatile matter content is practically smokeless when properly burned.

Next to the semi-bituminous comes the semi-anthracite, a hard coal, yet not as hard as the true anthracite. It burns without smoke and with a hot blue flame, or one slightly tipped with yellow.

Anthracite is the common popular hard coal, heavy, massive, which can be broken to specified sizes, doesn't crumble readily and burns without smoke.

Semi-bituminous coal is largely used for making coke and gas, but the relative importance of any coal deposit depends on the availability of the coal as well as its quality and quantity. The coal prospector must have an eye to geography as well as geology. The tremendous development of the Pennsylvania coal beds may in part be attributed to their proximity to the steel

mills of Pittsburgh, whereas Western coal remains comparatively unexploited because the iron and steel industry is still centered in the East.

Broadly considering the world's distribution of coal, it is remarkable that so few important deposits are found in the southern hemisphere. South America, Africa and Australasia combined hold less than 10% of the world's coal reserves. Another amazing feature is the huge reserve of lignite and subbituminous coal occurring in the western part of North America, notably along the Rocky Mountains and the great plains country to the east in the United States. It is estimated that some 40% of the world's total coal resources are contained in these sections.

On the other hand, high ranking coal seems to be pretty much confined to the East. And, in the United States at least, there is a strange lack of coal beds of any extent and quality near tidewater. The fields are all inland.

Some nine-tenths of this country's production of high-grade coal comes from the East—from Pennsylvania chiefly. The most easterly edge of the belt is represented by a small coal section in Rhode Island and Massachusetts known as the Narragansett Basin. Its chief interest is largely potential. Northeastern Pennsylvania is where the real producing area begins, and from this part of the state comes 99% of North America's hard coal. The Richmond basin in Virginia and North Carolina is a rich region of prospective utility rather than present importance.

In general the Eastern coal country spreads across Pennsylvania along the line of the Appalachians to Alabama. There are big fields in eastern Ohio, and in West Virginia.

The central or interior coal region comprises coal bearing areas in Michican, Illinois, Indiana, western Kentucky, Iowa, Missouri, Kansas, Oklahoma, western Arkansas and north central Texas. Most of the coal in these fields is bituminous, or sub-bituminous. Near Eagle Pass, down by Laredo, Texas, in the Rio Grande valley, there are enormous beds of low-grade bituminous coal that constitute one of the country's most valuable reserves.

The Northern great plains coal beds and those of the Rocky Mountain section lie for the most part in basins between the mountains or towards the northeast of the Rocky Mountain front line ranges, and are actually a future source of coal amounting to about half the world's total reserve, although at present there is but little demand for the low rank coal they contain and production is small. A few railroads, mines and smelters within the immediate reach of the coal fields are just now the chief consumers of coal from this section.

The Pacific coast deposits are comparatively small, and widely scattered. Washington holds the biggest share of them. Oregon has a few at Coos Bay and in other localities. California has still less spread in minor, isolated beds over the central and northwestern part of the state.

Canada has a fair share of coal reserves in the big bodies of low rank coal that exist in the midwestern provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan.

Besides a huge reserve within its boundaries the United States possesses coal fields in Alaska. Though these constitute less, or only about 1% of the nations' future coal supply, they are strategically very important as both the Bering River and the Matanuska beds are relatively near tidewater and hence readily accessible.

Coal prospecting like coal mining has become a highly specialized procedure. In the first place coal veins, or seams, are more apt to occur in rock formations entirely different from those that tend to produce the ores of metals. Metal ores are found as a rule in veins in the igneous rocks such as granite, or along contact zones between an igneous rock and a sedimentary one such as sandstone. Metallic ores may occur as particles scattered through-

out the vein material itself or in stringers and chunks in the vein. Coal, on the other hand, is generally found in the sedimentary rocks themselves in layers in the shales, clays, or sandstones. It is often not so much a vein as a distinct bed of material—the old bottom lands of some prehistoric marsh or swamp.

Typical farm country has produced coal fields, whereas the metallic ores are generally found in extremely mountainous country. Many a farmer has been made rich by the discovery of coal on his land. Few have won fortunes through finding copper, gold or silver hidden beneath the topsoil of the north pasture.

1—I am interested in trying to find a new part of the West in which to prospect for gold, and although I have been following The Sluice Box in ACE-HIGH MAGAZINE for some time now I notice that you never mention Oklahoma in connection with mining. (a) Has anybody ever looked for gold there? William Hamill, Auburn, New York.

Ans. (a) There has been plenty of gold prospecting done in Oklahoma but so far it hasn't produced much result. A little gold has been found . . . prospects have been staked and explored but the state has yet to show its real big gold mine. The Arbuckle Mountains, for instance, are fairly gopher-holed with prospect pits and small shafts. Selected samples have assayed nicely but that is about all.

2—Have been reading The Sluice Box for nearly a year and haven't missed an issue. What I am writing to you about is that I have often seen in the department many references to the malleability of gold as a test for that metal. (a) And I would like to know are there any other metals, or minerals found in prospecting that also are malleable and can be flattened with a hammer? Jack Crawford, Valdosta, Georgia.

Ans. (a) Yes. Native copper, nuggets of which are sometimes found in stream beds, is another malleable mineral. Platinum is extremely malleable. Native silver and a black-gray silver sulphide, known as argentite, are also fairly malleable and tend to flatten out rather than crumble under heavy pounding.

Do You Know Your SLUICE BOX?

1—What is the common or household name for anthracite?

2—From what state does most of this country's anthracite come?

3—Are there any coal reserves in the Pacific coast states?

4—Why are the Alaskan coal reserves economically important?

5—How was coal originally formed?

(The answers to these questions will be printed in the next issue of ACE-HIGH.)

Answers to Questions in First February Issue

1—The Black Hills of South Dakota are in the western part of the state. 2—The gold found in them made them of interest to prospectors and mining men. 3—The richest gold mine ever discovered in the U. S. was found in South Dakota. 4—It is a gold lode mine, not a placer proposition. 5—It has produced more than two hundred million dollars in gold bullion.

SOME practical hints on coal prospecting, together with a word or two about the mining laws where coal is concerned, which are different from the laws governing the staking of claims containing metallic ores or metals, will be given in the next issue of ACE-HIGH.

John A. Thompson

Howdy, Folks!

JUST as soon as was possible after the Second January issue of ACE-HIGH went on sale, which contained the first of these get-together pages that we are running nowadays, we received letters from some of you concerning various things that might be done to improve ACE-HIGH. You remember, we have been making this proposition: write to us if by any chance you can think of some way in which ACE-HIGH might be improved, because *to any reader of ACE-HIGH who gives us a suggestion that we, in our best judgment, decide is good, and that we adopt, we will give a year's subscription to ACE-HIGH.* And you may also remember that we went on to say that if it so happens that more than one of you should submit an identical winning idea, we would have to give the subscription to the first one from whom the idea was received.

These letters that we got contained nothing that was at all destructively critical. Everything in all of them was good and constructive, and was prefaced by remarks to the effect that it was some job to try to think of a way in which ACE-HIGH could be improved. We agreed with all of that, thanking you kindly. But what is more to the point right now, we agreed also that one suggestion was a good one, that it should be adopted, and that we will put it into effect as soon as possible. The reader who gave us this particular suggestion is Joseph Green, 163 E. Main Street, Mt. Sterling, Ohio. We take great pleasure consequently in announcing that Joe Green has been awarded a year's subscription to The Magazine of Them All, ACE-HIGH. Congratulations, Joe!

Here is part of what the first subscription winner had to say: "I read my ACE-HIGH in about two nights after getting it from the newsstand. I noticed your remark about those who offered suggestions that were favorable. That certainly is a good prize. In all the time I have read ACE-HIGH, I haven't noticed anything wrong with it. But I have a suggestion to make. Add to ACE-HIGH lives of different frontiersmen and early Westerners and others. I am sure the readers would be thankful and enjoy them. Some readers have their own conception of stories and many think Western stories are impossible. I have read some of the biographies of frontiersmen and badmen, etc., and I am sure the Western stories are based on pure facts."

Just as soon as is possible, we will start publishing in ACE-HIGH good biographies and biographical sketches of famous and interesting Westerners. It is not going to be easy to get the best ones, but you can count on us doing our best for you all as usual. The stories in ACE-HIGH are the best that we can find, and we promise you that the biographical articles will be of the same high quality. Just plain, true facts about interesting Westerners will not be enough; the articles will be interestingly and well written also. We'll find these articles for you; just give us time. And we'll be glad to have you tell us the names of men about whom you would like to read.

And now we'll be saying adios. We feel sure that we'll have some more interesting things to discuss with you the next time we get together. In the meantime, good luck!

THE EDITOR.

A GET-TOGETHER DEPARTMENT FOR GENERAL SERVICE TO OUR READERS

Conducted by The Storekeeper

THE BARGAIN COUNTER

If you want to exchange something you have, but don't want, for something you want that someone else has, here is the place to do it. It must be understood that Ace-High *cannot be held responsible* ***for losses sustained by our readers.***

Announcements inserted free of charge, but they must not exceed 21 words inclusive of name and address, and must be either typed or hand printed. Nothing but BONA FIDE trades are eligible: announcements of articles for sale will be ignored. State both what you have and what you want. Study ***samples of announcements in this issue for the proper way to draft yours.***

The United States Government prohibits mailing of firearms capable of being concealed on the person, therefore, swaps of revolvers, pistols, etc., will not be published in "The Bargain Counter."

Have unused British and Colonial stamps to trade for air mails from all countries. Alexander S. Gooding, 354 Norwich Road, Ipswich, England.

Will give 200 different stamps for 100 U. S. commemoratives. Joseph Gustaw, 4986 Junction Ave., Detroit, Mich.

Have books, 8 ft. telescope, pocketscope, arrowheads, flashlights, stamps. Want vest-pocket kodak, banjo, coins. Kyle Taylor, Box 607, Artesia, N. M.

Model glider, primary, for every 50 Indian head pennies, perfect, wonderful flyer. Others. R. Botschen, 4421 N. Hermitage Ave., Chicago, Ill.

[illegible] M. E.

Want banjo uke, violin, accordion. Have guitar, drafting set, magazines, books, flashlight, etc. E. J. Cable, Main St., West Manchester, Ohio.

United profit sharing coupons, magazines, any other articles, for old U. S. coins. George R. Alexander, 1001 N. Linden St., Bethlehem, Pa.

3 different cards for 10 different stamps, foreign cards for 3 different stamps, postmarks also to trade for stamps. L. Erle White, 525 W. 29th St. No. 3, Norfolk, Va.

Old valuable violin to trade for Brispitte outfit, complete. P. J. Quinlivan, Gen. Del., Corpus Christi, Texas.

Want swords, bayonets, daggers or foreign curios. Have radio, radio cabinet, books, coins, and electrical supplies. G. M. Allen, 96 Greenwood St., Canisteo, N. Y.

Have stamps to trade for old firearms or anything I can use. Square deal always. W. E. Swanson, 11-A 5th St., Weehawken, N. J.

Have good foreign stamps for Indian head pennies, other U. S. coins, and U. S. stamps. C. Morrissey, 65 Clinton Ave., Westwood, N. J.

[illegible] this slip, fill and mail it with your announcement—it entitles you to one *free* insertion in this Department. Announcements are limited to 21 words—trades only—no others considered. Announcements must be plainly typed or hand-printed. Mail them to Ace-High, 30 Lafayette St., New York, N. Y.

Name .....

Street .....

City .....

(Void after February 20, 1931.)

Want college pennants, photos of airplanes, aviators, boxers, baseball stars, etc. Also foreign air mail stamps. Write. Gill, 11 Moffett Ave., Trenton, N. J.

Liederman course for S. A. fancy 45 belt and two holsters. J. Boswell, 33 Springdale Blvd., Toronto, Ont., Canada.

Have 1929 Scott's catalog to trade for best offer in precancels, U. S. and Norway stamps. A. W. Larson, Box 52, Orondo, Wash.

Want merry-go-round flying horses, hand-power, lots to trade. What's offered? Geo. Smith, 3639 Beaubien, Detroit, Mich.

Want motorcycle in good condition. Have hound, guns, kodak, portable part of camp outfit and other articles. Write for information. Jess L. Bacon, R. 3, Pittsford, Mich.

Will swap old-time boy's dime novels for others. Send list. Ben Franklin Press, 3432 N. Bodine St., Philadelphia, Pa.

Texas blue bonnet seed for trade. Will trade our Lone Star State flower seed for anything I can use. Mrs. Lela Comer, Cherokee Route, San Saba, Texas.

Want to trade stamps with foreign readers, any quantity. Also have many things to trade. Swap lists. D. H. Hennon, R. D. 1, Box 199, Newton Falls, O.

Six unique and valuable formulas for every Liberty head nickel or street car token I get. Any formula supplied, make offer. A. Moore, Box 251, Newark, N. J.

1928 long full stock gun, Ky. rifle, brass mounted model, airplane, big bunch of fossils and curios. Want short guns, coins, relics, or? L. Wagner, 1117 So. 3rd St., Ironton, O.

Want battery radio. Have formulas of any kind, bobcat, coyote, badger furs, cactus, jack rabbit ears, or most anything you want. Nina Buttler, R. 2, Box 34, Fowler, Colo.

Have 250 magazines, all kinds. Want old U. S. or foreign coins, bills, electric vibrator, typewriter, or? Trade lists. Richard Evans, Box 1, Espy, Pa.

Want U. S. encased postage stamps. Will exchange U. S. commemorative half dollars. B. D. Preston, Box 555, Long Beach, Calif.

Old U. S. and foreign stamps, off and on cover, wanted. Have stampless covers, coins and arrowheads. Am teacher. Ed. Lockwood, Box 264, Forest Park Sta., Springfield, Mass.

Will give one pound of mission mixture, for four air mail covers with cachets, two foreign for each precancel sent me. A. F. Hill, Box 1580, Vernon, Texas.

Have copy Stradivarius violin with U. S. School of Music course. Want portable typewriter. A. W. Witsberger, 2222 Eoff St., Wheeling, W. Va.

Several hundred articles for exchange. What have you? What do you want? Send for complete list. Daniels, Boulevard, Statesville, N. C.

Foreign stamps, also precancels and postmarks to exchange. Prompt reply. Carl W. Frost, R. F. D. No. 2, Cambridge, O.

Trade watermelon seed, cacti plants, flashlights, arrowheads, for broken flashlights or anything useful. J. T. Mills, Vernon Hill, Va.

Have tenor banjo course, 52 lessons. Want obo, xylophone bells, table model electric radio without tubes, or? H. Gray, 213 Harrison St., East Orange, N. J.

Want Golden Book Magazine for 1927-28-29-30. National Geographics for years before 1913. Have magazines, record, etc., to exchange. Chas. J. Rike, Box 294A, Farmersville, Texas.

Want old copies "Weird Tales," also U. S. coins. Will trade magazines, two for one. Have magazines, coins, etc. S. Springer, Millheim, Pa.

Please send a letter by air mail from any country and I'll do the same. A. Sanders, 426 W. 4th St., Mt. Carmel, Ill.

Architect will exchange drawings, 150 player piano rolls, and a reliable cold remedy, for what have you? Irvin Dray, R. 1, Creve Coeur, Mo.

Have stamps. Want coins, medals, relics, cactus, or? Will answer letters. W. Koch, 802 Park Ave., Hoboken, N. J.

Have Elgin watch, guns, razors, steel traps, books, for airplane or collie dog, or? No trash. C. M. Murphy, Trask, Mo.

Cook and parts for trade, good rabbit hound, for gun, or what have you? No trash. Luther Sargent, 515 E. Ash, Piqua, O.

Have free booklet on hypnotism. Want stamps, coins, or? Earl M. Jackson, 115 W. Holston Ave., Johnson City, Tenn.

What have you for a 1790 Macclesfield half penny? H. C. Ganzer, 2226 Seventh Ave., Los Angeles, Calif.

Want a letter from you. Will trade for what I have. George McKnight, 23 Elias St., Amsterdam, N. Y.

Send me a pennant from your town and get one from mine. John L. Longar, 5303 Luther Ave., Cleveland, O.

Want swords, new poncho, mess kit, flashlight, or pup tent. Have 6-hole blank automatic, desk set, etc. W. Grund, 1160 Park Ave., New York City.

Want foreign and U. S. coins. Have folding kodak, clothbound books, arrowheads, fountain pens, flashlight. Want lists. Chas. Billings, 838 E. 55th St., Chicago, Ill.

Have 1922 and Indian head pennies. Want Geographics dated before 1913, Golden Book Magazine, 1927 or later. Chas. J. Rike, Box 294A, Farmersville, Texas.

Have 1926 Oakland sedan, aviation course, Audel's mechanic guides, electric motor, dynamo, radio parts, batteries and formulas to trade. C. Mikolajczyk, 3312 S. Fisk St., Chicago, Ill.

Salesmanship course, N. S. T. A., perfect condition, for Graflex movie camera, or? J. L. Carothers, 909 Elm St., Youngstown, Ohio.

Three years' Adventure, 3 fountain pens, East folding kodak, short-wave adapter, 1-tube, 25 automatic. Want furs, opals. W. C. Harrison, Hotel Strong, 121 6th St., Pittsburgh, Pa.

Want radios, speakers, B batteries, and 3 x 5 printing press with type. Have parts for Fords and Oaklands and 100 other things. Send first. I. Gribben, 88 West Main St., East Palestine, O.

How to remove warts, musical instruments, anything of value. J. D. Epling, Oakley, Calif.

Have wrestling course, field glasses, hundreds of magazines. Want .30-30 Winchester, or what have you? Write. Dwight Strawser, Liverpool, Pa.

Have uke, A battery, tubes, powder horn, books, guns, amateur radio parts. Want firearms of all kinds, musical instruments. Burnham, 9 Dewey St., Hudson, Mass.

Have 5 boys' books. Will exchange for cartridge belt with holster. Neil T. Lackner, 32-87 37th St., Long Island City, N. Y.

Bench drill press, bench lathe, oil heating stove, gasoline lamp. Want pump gun, watch. R. R. Rearick, 76 N. Main St., Sharon, Pa.

Photo electric devices, X-ray tube, telsa and induction coils wanted. Have many things to offer. F. Copeman, 15 W. 37th St., New York City.

Have lots things to trade, let's exchange lists. Want jewels, coins, ivory, silver, books, type, or? Carpenter, 416 Gladstone, Indianapolis, Ind.

Atwater Kent radio, tubes, dog, trickle charger, Baldwin earphones, for guns, electric motor, or? Bernard Cohn, 1029 Hall Place, N. Y. City.

Want books or courses on hypnotism, auto-suggestion, mesmerism, psychoanalysis, therapy, occult science, etc. Mental books wanted, too. For? E. Michaud, 236 Katahdin Ave., Millinocket, Me.

Movie machine, 2,000 ft. film, No. 1 chemical set, roller skates, games, etc. Want tennis racket, sax, bicycle tires, exchange lists. J. F. Woodward, 741 Wells St., Price Hill, Cincinnati, O.

Want good unbroken arrows, spears, any amount. Have many things, 5 years old. What do you want? Geo. W. Haskin, Swittwater, Pa.

Want Indian head cents. Have foreign coins. Write or come. L. Ray Dixon, 514, Deming, N. M.

Antique lithograph pictures, etchings, engravings, maps, books, for old coin collection, ladies' watches, medals, or? Mimeograph list. V. J. McMurtry, 4133 Kenmore Ave., Chicago, Ill.

Will give two foreign stamps for each precancel and will give one pound mission mixture for 300 precancels. A. F. Hills, Box 1580, Vernon, Texas.

Want show card course. What do you want? Doris Simmonds, 2729 - 20th St., Sacramento, Calif.

Have Benjamin rifle, Mayfair engine, long list. Want parrot, professional punching bag, offers, everyone answered. Jack Reardon, 3129 Lloyd St., Omaha, Nebr.

Want old coins and stamps. Have books, law, etc., old Confederate paper money, old newspapers, 1860 to 1877, old letters, 1840 to 1875, old key winders, etc. H. E. Edwards, 1418A Salisbury St., St. Louis, Mo.

Have 70 acres central Indiana with house, barn and chicken house for location near Phoenix or Glendale, Ariz. E. Carpenter, 502 Lewis Ave., Evansville, Ind.

Have 8 species fur rabbits, chickens, pocket radio, foxes, etc. Want Crossman or repeater rifle, milk goat. Col. H. E. Houcher, Brevard Inst., Brevard, N. C.

Will send 200 nice foreign stamps for each 100 U. S. precancelled stamps sent me. Martin A. Pierson, Box 2193, Hessville, Ind.

Want wrenches, tools, etc. Will trade boxing gloves, muscle builders, tops, marbles, radio, or? Sam Bishop, La Feria, Texas.

Have .10ga. shotgun, single barrel, also bicycle, complete course, exchange for greyhound or Ford coupe, no junk. Mrs. Lula Taylor, 726 Central Ave., Hamilton, O.

Want motorcycles, parts and tools, printing and office supplies and firearms. Have large list. Associated Motors, Lock Box 77, Hummels Wharf, Pa.

Late model Underwood portable typewriter, excellent condition, like new. Want radio vibroplex bug, or? Bureny, Northeast Lightship, Lighthouse Depot, Staten Island, N. Y.

All kinds of stamps wanted, also other small articles. I have a large list. Write. C. Walck, Box 265, Lansford, Pa.

Will give two U. S. gold dollars for every three-dollar gold piece sent me, or what have you? Judson H. Ramsey, 523 E. Highland, Quitman, Ga.

Large astrological reading, with lucky numbers, exchanged for old coins or stamps. Give birth date. Thurston, 20 W. Jackson Blvd., Chicago, Ill.

One good foreign stamp sent for each United cigar or profit coupon. Send same and receive square deal in exchange. G. Gessler, Jr., 479 Palisade Ave., Garfield, N. J.

Will trade gladiola bulbs for arrowheads. Keene Bigger, Lairdsville, Penna.

Have .20 ga. Iver Johnson. Will trade for what have you? F. Hetrick, 111 Painter St., So. Connelsville, Pa.

I will send 4 foreign stamps for each air mail stamp sent me from U. S. or other country. B. B. Bronson, 138 Beech St., Belmont, Mass.

A. H. 2

Have a circulating library and would like to exchange books with library owners. Louis Conf. Store, 144 Cedar St., Glen Cove, Mass.

U. S. stamps and precancels wanted. Have thousands of late foreign issues and U. S. certificates to trade. Chris. Hayes, Room 208, Customs House, New York.

Have new Mah Jong game. Want ladies' clothing, lingerie, new, size 38. M. Howard, R. 2, Box 32, Haskell, Me.

Have course, playing piano by ear. Want accordion, automatic concertina, musical saw, or? Frank Mlodzik, 236 State St., Hartford, Wis.

Ferrets, automobiles, guns, watches, chinaware. Want coins, old books, old guns, picture jewelry, anything old. J. Dalton, Wellsville, O.

Want cheap farm in Florida with improvements, no swamp. Have special six Studebaker touring, guns, books, course, or? Will answer all letters. H. H. Joiner, Box 432, Fayette, Ala.

Güitar to exchange for an old Blunder-buss gun or stamp collection. W. Moore, 44 River, Salamanca, N. Y.

Have Benjamin air rifle, chemcraft, engine, sun watch, stamps, books, etc. Want small printing press, larger chemcraft, ping pong, magazines, or? Gordon Lee, Karnak, Ill.

Want motorcycle. Have 15-jewel Illinois watch, 4-tube radio, typewriter, also want law books. John Polk, 609 S. Gov. St., Evansville, Ind.

Want ivory figures and small antiques. Will give anything in exchange. German Pobliner, 20 Magaw Place, New York City.

Have Hawkeye camera, ice cream freezer, 3 coin bank, 4 embossed and framed Indian pictures, 12" x 9½", movie and Western magazines. Want anything. Walter Fried, 708 Pennington St., Elizabeth, N. J.

Want B eliminator preferably, 225 volts and triple gang condenser. Have .22 Savage, radio parts, camera, or? E. Moccia, 1204 E. Monroe St., Jacksonville, Fla.

Have advertising course, 6 vols., rare books, 143 years old, Seneca camera. What? A. J. Schroeter, 1052 Diversey Blvd., Chicago, Ill.

Printers' supplies for field-glasses or a typewriter in good condition. Nothing else wanted. Printer, 1796 45th St., Brooklyn, N. Y.

Have 24 Merriwells. Want old Westerns. Send for names and numbers of mine. Kent, 1661 Lurting Ave., Bronx, N. Y.

Want arrowheads, stamps, guns, printing press supplies, or? Have "The Mystifier," a very mysterious pocket novelty. Micky Mason, 1750 Howe St., Racine, Wis.

Wild animal traps of every kind and best coon dog this far North. What have you? Cecil Atkinson, Box 446, Mandan, N. Dak.

Have flashlight, ice-skates, 20 boys' books, bugle, 35 magazines, hatchet with case, baseball bat. Want bike and banjo, trade lists. T. Dionne, 284 Dwight St. Ext., Springfield, Mass.

Have antique copper oil can, looks like teapot, with small plunger to force oil up. Want guns, or? Clare, 1938 Chislett St., Pittsburgh, Pa.

Have high-power Winchester rifle, .12 ga. double Ithaca, arrows, gold coins. Want guns. Emmett Lewis, Morehead, Ky.

I will give 2 foreign stamps for every precancel sent me. Send no less than 15. Bel Pitcheverry, 1728 Bedford St., Los Angeles, Calif.

Want typewriter, excellent condition. Have guaranteed working slugs and .12 ga. sawed off shotgun. Melvin Young, R. 2, Two Rivers, Wis.

Two lots second block courthouse square, county seat town, west Texas, for good Model A roadster, coupe, or delivery truck. O. R. Denton, Cave Springs, Ark.

Have old U. S. and foreign coins, books, [illegible]. Want old U. S. coins and guns. T. E. Gulley, 2211 Virginia Ave., Louisville, Ky.

Stamps, your pick, exchanged for coins, bills, medals, coupons, curios, etc. H. N. Martinsen, Box 96, Station Y, New York City.

[illegible]-acre home site, beautiful Ozarks, northern Arkansas. For what? Ruth Miller, Gen. Del., Oklahoma City, Okla.

Will [illegible] lot of splendid [illegible] chain for light trucks. S. D. Gardom, Box 547, Wilcox, Ariz.

[illegible] for acreage and improvements in Ozarks. Henry C. Berg, Box 323, Hot Springs, Ark.

Girl's silk dresses, size 7-8, canaries and cages to exchange for Pekinese or kitten. Mrs. H. T. Mettetal, Fulton, Miss.

Want 8 x 10 camera, also telephoto lens. Swap battery charger, 2A folding Brownie for 3A kodak. Carl Pedersen, 7251 Brynhurst Ave., Los Angeles, Calif.

Hand-made beaded chokers and necklaces make nice Christmas presents. Want postcard views of airplanes, or? N. S. Galster, 208 W. Fayette St., Syracuse, N. Y.

Have Confederate and [illegible] bank bills, stamps, old books, fairy or lucky stones, etc. Want Indian relics, and? Dan Holmes, 122 W. Main, Luray, Va.

What have you in U. S. and foreign covers? Write. J. H. Logan, Altamont, Apt. 33, Charlottesville, Va.

Send all Canada current, 12c, 50c, $1.00 air mails, commemoratives, registry, etc., and receive 90% nice foreign stamps. Basis Scott. Mischek, Box 153, S. Norwalk, Conn.

Want to trade R. C. A. superheterodyne battery set for an A. C. electric motor, ½ h. p. or larger. Schwabe, 3,500 Raymond, Houston, Texas.

Have Winchester repeater, loud speaker, gasoline lamps and lantern, electric incubator and brooder. Want encyclopedia, or? Thompson, Box 62, Durham, N. C.

Have covers, poster stamps, or U. S. stamps on envelopes. Want coins, or? Albert R. Kramer, 183 Rochester Ave., Brooklyn, N. Y.

[illegible] for [illegible]. If [illegible] with [illegible] good trade. What have you? J. H. Myers, 1[illegible] Ave., Toledo, O.

Have hand-painted handkerchiefs, washable, direct to wearer from Mexico. Want good silk hose, size 10, or [illegible]. Lucile Decker, 3815 N. Central Ave., Phoenix, Ariz.

Have a year's True Story Magazines, number of True Romances, also Flemish giant rabbits. What have you? Elizabeth McKinney, R. 5, Niles, Mich.

For every large 1c or ½c U. S. piece I will send 100 [illegible] foreign stamps. [illegible] M. Sprung, Burleson, Wharton, Texas.

Dynamic speaker, meters, camera, others. Want Spitz pup, small camera, or? Will exchange postcards. D. Messenger, Box 873, Roanoke, Va.

Ever try .40-72 loads in .405 for short ranges? Have supply, will exchange. R. Welker, 406 N. Harvey, Oak Park, Ill.

Have 2 1863 pennies, 1 Spanish, 1 Cuban, and 1 Dutch. Would like .22 repeater or shotgun. All letters answered. J. Williams, 608 E. 19th St., Erie, Pa.

Want Sax Rohmer set. Trade detective novels for others. Wm. P. Schramm, Balaton, Minn.

Want ukes, guitars and banjos. Have interesting list. Tom Hirz, 339 Totowa Ave., Paterson, N. J.

Have stamps, jewelry, rings, necklaces, other goods. [illegible] old weapons, guns, [illegible] Woods daguerreotypes, old land grant. Dr. J. C. Edmundoz, Box 126, Zolfo Springs, Fla.

Gent's size 11 calf skin coat, fur on, racing skates on size 9 shoes, for offers. Miller, 431 Main, Norfolk, Va.

Want stamps of any kind. Have a list of new articles. Walter Frank, 1721 Wallen Ave., Chicago, Ill.

Have [illegible] mm. movie projector, newest electric model, ice skates, books and magazines. Want printing press (state size). Irwin Goldberg, 2841 Cortez St., Chicago, Ill.

23-j. 12 size Hampden watch, and 17-j. 12 size Elgin [illegible] New [illegible] or offers. W. A. Beaman, 30 Mattoon St., Springfield, Mass.

Have [illegible] of all kinds, one Sterling tube test, one [illegible] B [illegible] vest pocket, for 2c nickel, 3c ½ dozen, 50c pound. C. Bretings, 858 E. 60th St., Chicago, Ill.

For 12 Indian head pennies or 3 Liberty head nickels I will swap one mystifier. Send for more than one. Micky Mason, 1250 Howe St., Racine, Wis.

Want tropical sea curios and sea shells. Have fossil shell printed rock. Write L. Chapman, Box 766, Franklin, N. J.

Land wanted. Have land in Texas and lots in Tennessee. Virgil McWhorten, R. F. D. 9, Nashville, Tenn.

Want swords, daggers, old guns, big trade list of relics, old coins, tools, semi-precious stone, etc. Florida property to trade for other property. W. H. Goulding, Box 543, Eustis, Fla.

Have [illegible] cut bone, size 9, camera, shoulder holster and shells for .82 cal. Colt, harmonica, etc. What have you? H. C. Hasbrouck, Clarkslake, Mich.

Have landing gear for light plane. Will trade for A. C. radio [illegible] or Radiola 104 power speaker. R. Mason, [illegible] E. Oak, Lamar, Colo.

Have radio, parts, uke, wrist watch, etc. Prefer good .45 automatic, daggers, or? Write for list. Send yours. Wm. Zukert, 2963 Lafayette Ave., New York, N. Y.

Three pair handcuffs, two pair leg irons, finger print outfit, cable exerciser, antiques, coins, for offers. Miller, 431 Main, Norfolk, Va.

Have 150 stereoscopic views, 25 to a set. Want stamps of all kinds. Walter Frank, 1721 Wallen Ave., Chicago, Ill.

Let's swap. What have you? What do you want? Send your list and get mine. C. A. Bubb, 5125 12th, Detroit, Mich.

Want coins, medals, stamps, air mail covers, bills, jewelry, Spanish course, arrowheads. Have [illegible] book of buried treasure, antiques, maps, watches. R. Lawrence, 26 Buickcourt, Akron, O.

Have [illegible] phonograph records, late and in perfect condition, that talk in old American and foreign, [illegible] old. Leonard Kerns, 12661 Filbert Ave., Detroit, Mich.

Want printers' cuts, borders, type, quantities U. S. and Canada air mails and commemoratives. Give stamps, or? Mischek, Box 153, S. Norwalk, Conn.

Have books by Grey, Curwood, Wright, Seltzer, etc., also 100 magazines and stamps. Want typewriter, or? Sam Willard, 216 W. Poplar St., Durant, Okla.

Want "Strengthening the Eyes," by Bernarr McFadden, "Instantaneous Personal Magnetism," by Shaftesbury, and art magazines. S. Keer, 6893 Waldo St., Detroit, Mich.

Have Ithaca hammerless, .12, camera, kodak film tank, flash bag, books. Want fly rod and tackle, Llewellyn pups. Ole Culligan, 124, Julesburg, Colo.

Trade 6 vol. American Technical Society Carpentry and Contracting, nearly new. Want gun, or? A. Neubert, 6—108th St., Troy, N. Y.

Have accousticon for deaf people, give instructions in sign painting. Want most anything. L. H. Mathew, 1729 Laf. Ave., Terre Haute, Ind.

Will send two postcards for every Indian head cent sent to me. Will also trade postcard size camera for other. Herman K. Starke, 10 Beacon St., Newark, N. J.

Have A and B eliminators, radio parts, violin, cuckoo clock, books, etc. Want .22 repeater, outboard motor, reel, socket wrench set. Jack Kelly, 5111 Bartwill Ave., Cleveland, O.

Want all kinds cylinder and disc records. Write for list of names. Howard Grove, P. O. Box 282, Hillsboro, O.

For every 400 stamps sent, will give one hard covered book. Send for list. Chas. Peat, Box 51, Corona, Calif.

Will trade L. C. Smith field grade 1 trigger in good condition, 12 ga. Want auto loading shotgun, .12 or .16 ga. A. J. Budlover, 4113 W. 21st St., Chicago, Ill.

Want entire stamp collections, guns, banjo-uke, or? No junk. Exchange lists. David Brandt, 392 William St., East Orange, N. J.

Want anything for kalled trees and shrubs, cabin poles, wood, manzanita, bull pines, and lilac. Nellie Farnsworth, c/o Cohasset Stage, Chico, Calif.

Have radio parts, 210-281 tubes. Want tubes, R. F. choke coils, magazines, jewelry, or? J. W. Landon, 2... E. Lacock St., N. S. Pittsburgh, Pa.

Have nickeled Meisselbach fishing reel, 12 postcard size pictures, used Victrola records, books, etc. Want pattern maker's tools, guns, or? W. T. Werkhoven, 214 Chelsea Ave., Memphis, Tenn.

Will trade list for list. Carl Golly, 1017—44th St., Brooklyn, N. Y.

Land wanted. Have land in southwestern Texas and shady lots near Nashville, Tenn. Virgil McWhorten, R. F. D. 9, Nashville, Tenn.

Want guns, coins, bills, medals, tokens, swords, daggers, relics, arrowheads, etc. Have movie machine, guns, books, magazines, relics, coins, etc. K. R. Kelley, 412 N. Park St., Reedsburg, Wis.

700 stamps, U. S. army ornaments, for .22 rifle, or? P. Williams, Box 55, Fort Meade, So. Dak.

Have foreign stamps, formulas, travel books, magazines. Want U. S. stamps, gasoline lamps and lantern, box letter files. A. Welo, Maple Plain, Minn.

Want small Graflex, give make, model, lens size, number, speed, etc., in first letter. Have cornet with case, uke, B eliminator, or? Jas. Neale, 29 Fairmont Ave., New Haven, Conn.

Want Briggs and Stratton motorwheel, all boy mechanic's editions, concertina, prism binoculars. Have repeater, banjo-uke, kodak, telescope and list. J. Josky, 1107 N. Union St., Olean, N. Y.

Ice sled equipment, propeller, runners, etc., suitable for Ford engine, for new high-powered rifle. No junk. E. McCulloch, Elmwood, Wis.

Will trade double barrel hammer gun, .12 ga. twist barrel, good condition, for .410 handy gun. Joseph J. Budovec, 4113 W. 21st St., Chicago, Ill.

Want one or two-cycle motor or aviation books, have old Edison phonograph, swords, hypnotism course, radio parts, magazine, etc. G. G. Pless, 250 W. 105th St., New York City.

Have I. C. S. railway airbrake course. Want .30-40 cartridges or .12 ga. shells, or what have you? J. J. Budovec, 4113 W. 21st St., Chicago, Ill.

Will swap 10 stamps for a colored postmark. L. B. Wood, 90 Smith St., Lynbrook, N. Y.

Want cowboy boots, size 8½, in good condition, for? Estric Erwin, R. F. D. 2, Box 75, Hammond, Ia.

Have many things to trade for printing. Send your list, mine will follow. J. B. Colburn, 424 Main St., Rapid City, S. Dak.

Have old coins, Indian head cents, magazines, stamps, and other articles for what have you? C. W. Jones, Box 696, Sheffield, Iowa.

160 acres, 3 million feet timber, 430 acres, house, barn, ... 15 acres cleared. Cheaper than ... What? C. L. Elliott, 289 E. 53rd St., N. ... Ore.

Fishermen: all patterns hand tied flies. Want A-1 fly rod, no trash. P. W. Lee, 822 Failing Bldg., Portland, Ore.

Have .44 cal. Winchester carbine. Want higher powered rifle, must be in good condition. Lionel Anderson, R. 1, La Porte, Minn.

Want to exchange lists with boys 12 to 17 years. Have and want most anything. Arthur Heinrich, Box ..., Granite Falls, Minn.

Want printing press, ice skates, postcard size camera, ... list, trades only. V. Cleveland, Box 193, Clinton, Wash.

Have hundreds finest perfect bird eggs, gem points in country and 100 pearl ... to trade for perfect game, ... E. Edwards, 3016 Field Ave., Los Angeles, Calif.

Indian massacre photos, inlay pearl banjo, formulas, razor, business man's commercial law library for Indian arrowheads, and old Western photos. W. A. Bakey, Box 359, Morris, Minn.

Have electric tattoo outfit, keycheck stamping set, radio, trombone, mandolin, Kriss-kross strapper and large list. Want offers. Albert Eyre, 411 Liberty St., Camden, N. J.

Trade Popular Science, Popular Mechanics, Physical Culture, detective or adventure magazines for ... of Modern Mechanics. Chas. Constantine, 2... Salina Ave., Dearborn, Mich.

Mink, fox raisers, write for my list. Have many valuable articles for trade, including guns, radios, rabbits. W. Haverberg, Troy, Idaho.

Have voice repeater records, portable victrola, carpenter's tools. Want steel guitar, old coins, jewelry. Steve Radlowski, 2955A South Eleventh St., Milwaukee, Wis.

50 different stamps for each street car or bus token sent to me. R. W. Dunn, 4309 Myers Pl., Inglewood, Calif.

Want radio parts of every kind. Send list. What do you want? Norman M. Wray, Southport, N. C.

Swap articles for gold coins, U. S. and European. Gladys Rexicker, 29 Fernwood Ave., Rochester, N. Y.

Have ½ h. p. motor, radio parts, auto knitter, wood parts, many others for Indian beadwork, pipes, or? H. B. Weston, 40 Willow St., Reading, Mass.

Want gas engines, any kind, from ⅝ to 1½ h. p., traps, watch. State your wants. Have large list. Frank Meyer, Atlanta, Mich.

Have reel, rod, stamps, magazines, coupons, razors, coins, trade for Geographic Magazines, canaries, rabbits, love birds, coupons, etc. Chas. J. Rike, Box 294A, Farmersville, Texas.

Have pedigreed police matron or pups. Want antiques, canaries, or any pets or poultry. Mrs. Henry H. Russell, Box 1936, Nogales, Ariz.

A book for every $2 or $5 U. S. postage stamp sent me. Other articles for old U. S. stamps. A. Welo, Maple Plain, Minn.

What is offered for 1930 telephone directory of Cincinnati, Ohio? Want good foreign stamps. C. R. Van Pelt, 918 Livingston St., Cincinnati, O.

Swap 10 good copper claims, excellent reports. What have you? W. Stephens, 409 S. Marina St., Prescott, Ariz.

Wanted: Guns, binoculars, unused stamps in blocks (no junk). Send for my list. David Brandt, 392 William St., East Orange, N. J.

Will swap a one year's membership to the "Mondo Line" stamp club for your United profit sharing coupons. F. J. Falbaum, Jr., Cameron, Mont.

Want standard typewriter or portable, printing, A. C. motor, .12 repeater, or? Have violins, .44 Winchester rifle. W. Schwartz, 1421 E. 60th St., Chicago, Ill.

Have fine ukelin, good condition. Want typewriter, guns, or almost anything. Send list. Jos. Sauer, 1321 Portland Ave., Chicago Heights, Ill.

Give ten cartooning lessons with criticism for Hammond Multiplex typewriter or 7 x 10 printing press. P. A. Judd, 1806 E. Main St., Columbus, O.

Have modern and percussion lock guns, arrowheads, lineman's climbers, radio books, magazines. Want guns, or? Frank Fox, Hillsboro, O.

Have guns, Stanley combination planes, electric motor, etc. Want outboard motor, or what have you? R. W. Kester, 610 Madison St., Rochester, Ind.

Have violin, mandolin. Will trade for 8-power binoculars, or pair ferrets. Conny Doyle, Schenley, Pa.

Will send two good unbroken Indian arrow points for every National Geographic Magazine in good condition mailed me. J. M. Watts, Pontotoc, Miss.

Want Royal typewriter, furniture, police dog, auto, 4-wheel trailer, guns, binoculars. Have resort lot, portable victrola. A. Welo, Maple Plain, Minn.

Have fine ukelin, good condition. Want typewriter, [illegible] Send list. Jos. Sauer, 1321 Portland, Chicago Heights, Ill.

[illegible] short-wave receiver for [illegible] low powered [illegible], wave-meter, [illegible] parts, short-wave receiver, or? S. [illegible], 1000 S. Harlow Ave., Chicago, Ill.

Want clippings. Send me any number from American papers, will return [illegible] from English papers. M. Reddick, 1 Northcote Terr., Nottingham, England.

Have 41 Swiss repeater, A-1 condition. Will trade for .22 repeater, telescope, field glasses or shotgun. Will answer all letters. Mr. G. J. Oleksak, Jr., Bates Rd., Woronoco, Mass.

Have pioneer cap and ball rifle. Want set of Mark Twain, Red Heart, or [illegible]. Charles Bogert, Belfont, W. Va.

Ladies' pair hand embroidered pillow cases, tatted edge, [illegible] for [illegible] with work cards. Mrs. A. L. Macgowan, 19 Dean St., Portland, Me.

Have Daisy pump, books, magazines, football helmet, World War helmet. Want [illegible] knife, or? Paul Daly, 602 Broad St., Camden, Ark.

Want traps, trapping, hunting, and fishing supplies. Large list. Good swaps. Write. W. Swanger, 643 Whitehall St., Allentown, Pa.

Have fiction books. Want books by Poe, Stevenson, [illegible], Harrison, [illegible], Twain, short stories, text books, science, etc. Geo. Huk, Box M, Ambridge, Pa.

Have for exchange a ranch for what have you? Dr. Woodward Hammond, 1122 Rogers Ave., Mena, Ark.

Have magazines, books. Will trade for each five Indian head pennies sent. R. W. Partridge, 573 Mithoff St., Columbus, O.

Have match box tops to trade for stamps, U. S. and foreign. C. R. Van Pelt, 918 Livingston St., Cincinnati, O.

Have radio parts, tubes, speakers. Want parts, meters, [illegible], .22 [illegible], [illegible], [illegible]. J. W. Landon, 233 E. Lacock St., N. S., Pittsburgh, Pa.

Have cigar lighter, fishing rod, reel, watches, magazines, [illegible], [illegible] key rings. Want guns, or? J. Puljung, 2148 W. 23rd St., Chicago, Ill.

Have cornet. Want muskrats, pheasants, or? J. Grauberger, Jr., R. 1, Box 119, Lamar, Colo.

Have new Gearhart knitting machine. Want motorcycle with side car. H. M. Hefner, Beard, W. Va.

Tea-room. Roth Memory, mental efficiency courses. Want portable typewriter, antiques, coins, or? W. E. Bush, 18 E. Ave. A, San Angelo, Texas.

Have cactus, cactus wood, horns, small pets, horned frogs, chemicals for kodak, course, boxing gloves, or? Earl Colyer, Grenville, N. M.

Have dahlia bulbs, daisy roots, silk dress, size 38, headphones. Want wearing apparel or what have you? Also have leopard scarf. Mrs. Fred Koski, Box 103, Fort Pierre, S. D.

Will send you a large package of boys' novels, coins, stamps, war bills, games, merchandise, etc., for 4 unused U. S. 10c. stamps. Sam Canterman, 15 Tannehill St., Pittsburgh, Pa.

Will trade a Buescher C melody saxophone and case for a 20 x 48 in. cedar chest. L. Garner, Box 3, Spur, Texas.

Trade boxing gloves, mandolin, courses, leggings, many other things. Want [illegible], accordion, law courses, good sets of books, violin, mimeograph. A. Quenzer, 815 Barbey St., Brooklyn, N. Y.

Have Chinese war album of late Civil War. Want .22 Winchester special rifle. Geo. Ehrhardt, 1400 E. Wilson Ave., Glendale, Calif.

French, German and Mexican coins to trade for arrowheads and Indian relics. H. M. Prince, 2213 14th St., Lubbock, Texas.

Want piano accordion, .22 cal. Savage Sporter, .22 cal. model 39 Marlin, .12 ga. double, or .12 ga. pump gun. No junk wanted. Ed Liss, 4815 Homerlee Ave., E. Chicago, Ind.

Booklet of home addresses of movie stars, trade for U. S. stamps or what? Carl Schulz, 301½ S. Catalina, Los Angeles, Calif.

Have Westinghouse D. C. fan, violin, 8-tube radio, 4-in. .30-.30 cartridge belt, no junk. Trade all for good double or pumpgun. R. A. Shaw, 417 S. Lincoln Ave., Eagle Grove, Iowa.

Have detective, Western and love story magazines to trade for other Western magazines. Ronaghan, 1661 Lurting Ave., Bronx, N. Y.

Have foreign stamps to exchange for others (basis Scott). Send your selection or write. Elmer Sponholz, 930 Woodlawn Ave., W. Allis, Wis.

Have tenor banjo, Brownie camera, books, magazines, etc. Want U. S. gold, World War medals, jewelry, size 36 suit. James Wilson, 227 Howard Ave., Brooklyn, N. Y.

Want daggers, swords, beadwork, bills. Have guns, coins, medals, old West photos, opals, moonstones, agates. Vernon Lemley, Osborne, Kans.

Stamps and coins wanted for collection of 500 fine opals. Send what you have. C. F. Thirg, 12232 Flanders Ave., Detroit, Mich.

100 stamps, distinguished service stamp, 5 formulas, or what do you want for rare documents, old paints, old scientific books, Confederate bonds, etc. Box 51, Phoenixville, Pa.

Have chaps, boots, size 7½, spurs, .22 rifle, traps, branding irons, etc. Want Russian wolf hounds, or greyhounds. Ralph Oldham, Grenville, N. M.

Have books, magazines, courses, Whiz Bangs, stamps, cactus, deer horns, vest-pocket kodak, etc. Want barbells. Carl Clement, Grenville, N. M.

Want coins from any country, any kind. What do you want? Edw. J. Galeblewski, 824 Penna. Ave., Trenton, N. J.

Will give 100 stamps for every dedication cover, 250 for every C. A. M., 500 for every F. A. M. Lionel F. Baxter, 1413 N. 21st St., Birmingham, Ala.

Have Johnson 16 h. p. outboard and two boats for same, microscope, Ford, trade for good shift car, sedan or coupe. J. J. Bercik, 314 Pine St., Elizabeth, N. J.

Want books, have camera tripod, music stand. Blue [illegible] bag. G. D. Glover, P. O. Box 1, [illegible], Kans.

[illegible] I will exchange imprint. Will trade tattoo outfit for illustrating or drawing course. Soldier Dutch, 152 Fleming Ave., Newark, N. J.

Want printing press and supplies, duplicator. Have [illegible] machine, movie projector, and over 200 articles. Will swap list. Art Langlois, Box 387, E. Pepperell, Mass.

Have electrician's and short story courses, several sets of adventure and mystery books. Want watch or typewriter. Olan Ash, George West, Texas.

Have 88 movie star photographs, collection of autographs of celebrities. Send your trade lists, pre-[illegible] cameras, etc. D. Bensman, Two Rivers, Wis.

Have 125 magazines, various kinds. Want "Liberty Boys of '76." All letters answered. Arthur Neetz, [illegible] Chestnut St., Emaus, Pa.

Have [illegible], A 1 shape, trade for .22 high power or .24-20 [illegible] loud speaker, for .22 pump, or what have you. M. W. Greene, Silver City, New Mexico.

Have [illegible] prehistoric curios, stamps, [illegible], Crosley [illegible], Atwater-Kent loud speaker, war goods, etc. Want binoculars, old guns, or? C. T. Dale, Mendon, Mo.

Want motorcycle, watches, guns, old coins, outboard motor. Have stamps, guns, swords, razor, skates. Edwin Stieler, 2503 S. Harvard, Independence, Mo.

Have pigeons to trade for rabbits or other pets. Want National Geographic Magazines. Send dates. Raymond A. Rike, Box 147, Farmersville, Texas.

Want U. S. encased postage stamps in good condition. Will exchange U. S. commemorative half dollars, uncirculated. R. D. Preston, Box 555, Long Beach, Calif.

Trade new Conservo steam cooker. Will trade for good electric waffle iron, electric doughnut mould, electric train or what? M. Waken, 209—4th St., Fulton, Ky.

Have [illegible] quality Stetson hat, new, size 7½, Western style. Want typewriter, or? J. Johnson, R. D. 8, Brasher Falls, N. Y.

Have [illegible] of photos taken by Queen Alexandria of royalty, 1908. Want offers. S. Wright, 20 Elm Grove, Cricklewood, N. W. 2, London, England.

Trade 20-acre homesite, beautiful Ozarks, northern Arkansas. For what? E. B. Miller, Egbert Hotel, Oklahoma City, Okla.

Have golf balls and club, tees, stamps, German coin, checkers, and oil lamp. Want coins, arrowheads. A. Nowatka, 142 E. Main St., Paterson, N. J.

Remington typewriter, American School of Music piano course, never been used, to trade for good B eliminator, dry type. J. Russell, 164 No. Maple, Florence, Mass.

Have Indian beaded bags, air mail covers, coins, large [illegible], etc., for Chinese loop stone earrings, U. S. coins. T. J. Calligan, 707 No. Arthur Ave., Pocatello, Idaho.

Have stamps, coins, cartooning course, ice skates, and 1927 stamp catalog. Want .22 repeater, or? Write for list. Stanley Shenkel, 423 Elwood Ave., Oakland, Calif.

I have large [illegible] of Scandinavia to trade for stamps [illegible] basis Scott's catalog, write. H. J. Lindhardt, 7106—10th Ave., Los Angeles, Calif.

Want "Bug" telegraph key. What do you want? J. O. Routh, R. 2, Box 258, Sarasota, Fla.

Want pair of cavalry breeches, 30-in. waist, pair cavalry leggings and spurs, or cavalry boots, size 6½ or 7. What in exchange? J. Hadfield, 349 Plant Ave., Tampa, Fla.

Have thousands of foreign and American coins. Want weapon relics or antiques. Frank Saco, 735—45th St., Brooklyn, N. Y.

Want transmitter, airplane, outboard motor, movie picture camera and projector with films. No junk. What do you want? Wm. G. Thiele, 1123 S. 12th St., Hamilton, O.

Have match covers, post marks, foreign stamps, Indian bloodstone, postcards. What have you? All letters answered. Mrs. Paul Gall, 701 Washington Ave., Riviera Park, Belleville, N. J.

For each three Indian head cents sent me I will send 10 nice foreign stamps or one foreign coin in good condition. Ruth Horne, Sparkman, Ark.

Want guns. Have U. S. and foreign army rifles, war relics, kodak, etc. H. Kraft, Ludington, Mich.

Have buff cochin bantams, books, ACE-HIGHS, stamp album full of stamps, ducks. Want rabbits, pigeons, or? Roger W. Brotz, 1st St., Chelmsford, Mass.

New German air pistol, radio parts, Ica camera, ¼ A. C. motor, Stanley and Disston tools, books. Want anything useful. Write. R. Ekholm, 661 Millbury St., Worcester, Mass.

Have and want cartoons, cartoon courses, books, etc. Will exchange letters and cartoons with anyone. D. Armitage, 25 Magog St., Sherbrooke, Que., Canada.

Send me old Beadle dime and half dime novels, also old books on Indians, North and West, Indian curios, old weapons, anything in exchange. Albert Heath, Harbor Springs, Mich.

Have imported French literature, am interested in same. Let's trade. Send list in first letter. R. Neale, 22 Ripley St., Malden, Mass.

Will trade for any useful article or novelty a copy of my song, "Annabelle," with words and music. J. P. Schmidt, 932 W. 54th St., Chicago, Ill.

Have C melody soprano saxophone and case, trumpet, trombone, football outfit, refills for fuses. Want E-flat alto sax, or? R. Dunne, 1536 Orchard St., Chicago, Ill.

Have [illegible] assorted foreign war bills from European countries, over 1,200 different kinds. Want Corona or Remington portable typewriter. S. Canterman, 15 Tannehill St., Pittsburgh, Pa.

Have [illegible]-tube Radiola. Want tenor-banjo or ice skates, size 8. Wm. R. Moffitt, 911 North Ave., Wilkinsburg, Pa.

Have [illegible] arms, tents, auto tools. Want anything useful. Wilfred Henry, Box 229, Marietta, O.

Will trade three U. S. stamps for each foreign stamp sent me. I have Vol. 2 of Leslie's magazines, 1858. What am I offered? I. Court, R. 1, Janesville, Ind.

Every date large cents, 1816 to 1857, all nice. Want new Corona or Remington portable typewriter. J. E. Toy, R. 2, Waynesville, N. C.

Want a garden tractor, what do you want? B. F. Wilco, Hamlin, Texas.

Fine violin, over 200 years old. No copy, good condition. For real estate, car, or? J. K. Elliott, Fort Lupton, Colo.

Airplanes, meteorplane, Lincoln Allison, Gnome 165, Gnome 50, Laurence, Hisso, etc. What have you? Aero Supply, 1510 W. Dravius, Seattle, Wash.

Want books of short stories, any kind, old or new. Will give 15 assorted action magazines for each. F. J. Cuerier, 436 S. Junction Ave., Detroit, Mich.

What's offered for a B eliminator in good working order, electric curling iron, new, also [illegible]? Would like a good typewriter, or? J. Russell, 164 No. Maple St., Florence, Mass.

Have Liederman course. Want deer rifle, good camera, steel [illegible], golf clubs, or good leather bags. Art Bachler, 3335—3rd St., N., Minneapolis, Minn.

Want guns, have pepper box, army rifles, .410 shotgun, kodak, war relics, exercisers, etc. H. Kraft, Ludington, Mich.

Have many different stamps for any trade. Will make drawings and blueprints from your sketches for what have you? H. Aronson, 796 Killarney St., San Jose, Calif.

Stamps, your pick, exchanged for coins, bills, coupons, medals, curios, etc. H. N. Martinsen, Box 96, Station Y, New York City.

Will trade even 50 1930 Western and detective magazines, for 50 1929 Western or detective magazines. Ray Hemme, Perry, Kans.

Have binoculars, Conley camera No. 2C, set 8 oz. boxing gloves, new, Strongfort course, [illegible] pipe. Want old guns, daggers, or? E. F. Carlson, R. 4, Box 115, Little Falls, Minn.

For every stamp sent me cataloging more than 10c. I will send 25 different stamps. Harry Seligman, 371 Elwood, Oakland, Calif.

Have stamp album and over 50 magazines. Will trade for radio parts, or what have you? J. Hollingsworth, 3250 Lincoln Ave., Inglewood, Calif.

Have three clothbound books to swap, "The Forlorn River," "The Barker," and "The Lone Star Ranger." Want ACE-HIGHS before Sept. 1929. J. Martin, 111 W. Mulberry St., Shamokin, Pa.

Double shotgun, .22 single rifle, bugle, .22 target, hunting vest for auto shotgun. Marvin Almon, Earlington, Ky.

Want bathroom fixtures, shotguns, shrubbery, razors, [illegible] .22, .32-20, .38 Winchester [illegible], kodak, books, etc. E. L. Chapman, R. 3, Harrisonburg, Va.

Have town lot in Oklahoma. Want big ten or Western horses. Have 90 acres farm for trade. J. D. Arnold, Judsonia, Ark.

Will trade Arkansas state tax stamps and match book covers for U. S. precancels. A. F. Hill, Box 1580, Vernon, Texas.

Want used and unused U. S. Graf Zeppelin stamps. Have stamps and cachet air mail covers, or? Elmer Palka, 5011 So. Washtenaw Ave., Chicago, Ill.

Have Harley Davidson twin, late Indian twin, Indian and Harley parts. Want binoculars, .16 or .20 ga. pump, no junk wanted. Herbert A. Voecks, Pierce, Nebr.

[illegible] have you in U. S. and foreign covers? Write. James H. Logan, Altamont Apt. 33, Charlotteville, Va.

Full course, 40 lessons taxidermy for exchange. What have you? Russell Murphy, 438 Mantua Ave., Woodbury, N. J.

Have guns, coins, war relics. Send list of what you have and want. Chas. Fritz, 4106 Main Ave., Norwood, Ohio.

Have pigeons. Want .22 rifle, beagle hound, .16 ga. [illegible] barrel shotgun, rabbits. Dan Grantham, R. 1, Skipperville, Ala.

Want typewriter, printing set. Have rare U. S. and foreign stamps. Have Scott catalogue of 1923, also have many hard covered books and coins. Hyman Colanier, 22 Barrett, Brooklyn, N. Y.

Send 20 old U. S. or foreign stamps, or one old coin for each kodak print, your negatives or films developed free. Jack Kiefer, 414 Wyoming Ave., Wyoming, O.

Have most anything in stone Indian relics. Want Enfield rifle, Belgian rifle, Oliver typewriter, set [illegible] binoculars, real estate. L. Walton Roe, Shelbyville, Ark.

Have kodak postcard size pictures, also opera glasses, nickel dated 1867. Joe Matvey, 96 Adams St., Campbell, O.

Have knives, magazines. Want motorcycle in good shape, can get most anything to trade for a good one. W. T. Lewis, R. 8, Paris, Tenn.

Have pair of 5 lb. dumbbells. Want Cowboy Stories. Kenneth Pardue, 7th St., Etowah, Tenn.

Will trade .22 rifle, 3 bulb radio set, 1 pair white kid pumps, .45 R. A. H. 18 army rifle shots, for coins, army rifle. R. R. McMillan, 88 Park St., Montclair, N. J.

Can use all U. S. 5c, 10c, 15c, 20c, air mails, commemoratives, special handling, if in excellent condition. Give 90% nice foreign stamps, or? Mischek Box 153, S. Norwalk, Conn.

Correspondence course, Smith typewriter, skates, projector, books, stamps, sporting goods, for good tenor banjo, or? M. Koskela, 127 East Maple St., Iron River, Mich.

100 stamps for each good specimen of semi-precious stone, high grade mineral or arrowhead. Have. E. Potter, c/o Wabash Depot, Champaign, Ill.

Ship-model and sailing vessel photos to trade for the same. Write what you have first. Merrill Peoples, 649 Alberta St., Portland, Ore.

Have Stromberg vapor burners, Oliver oil gas burners, brand [illegible] dynamic speaker, outboard motor, new Scout boat for same, offers? Max Belz, Wilder, Mo.

Want Scott's Into stamp catalog, large album. Have books, etc. No postals answered. Stanley Sehmuch, 94 Otis St., E. Cambridge, Mass.

Want bull pups. Have foreign coins, books, or? A. Loy, 64-18 Woodbine St., Ridgewood, N. Y.

Ozark land for Holton French horn, with hard case. Must be first class horn. Nelson B. Stickley, Bennington, Kansas.

Have beautiful deerhead, also coathanger made of four deers. Set for high grade .12 ga. shotgun and rifle. No junk. Alfred Larson, 1618 Edgewater Ave., Chicago, Ill.

Want cap and ball rifles with cylinders. Mail me your list. Chas. Fritz, 4106 Main, Norwood, O.

Anything wanted within reason for any and all dime and nickel novels and story papers, especially "Old King Brady." T. Burkland, 4203 Orchard Lane St., Omaha, Nebr.

Have tenor banjo, kodaks, binoculars, victrola, violin, watch, radio. Want outboard motor, offers. H. Russell, 2423 Colorado Ave., Santa Monica, Calif.

Home-made magazines, books, and also stamp collection to trade for what? Want curios, maps, camera. Scott Walls, 2042 Ruckle St., Indianapolis, Ind.

Have formulas, books, courses, magic art goods, will exchange for similar articles. Exchange lists. Oliver W. Nite, 1347 So. Water St., Wichita, Kansas.

Typewriter, course, books, stamps, sporting goods, movie equipment, magazines, heater, long list. Want printing press, guitar, etc. M. Koskela, 127 E. Maple St., Iron River, Mich.

Evergreens, fir, cedar, hemlock, also ferns, for fancy pheasants, ducks, fishing tackle, guns, typewriter, or? N. V. Faulhaber, Veneta, Ore.

Want [illegible] 7 x 11 prints. Have typewriter, printing. Bradley Whitfield, R. F. D. 1, Franklin, Tenn.

Have professional stage magic, large list. Want advertising, Liederman course, or? Moore, 1567 S. Oxford Ave., Los Angeles, Calif.

Have ¼ h. p. A. C. motor, A-1 condition. Want good one cylinder gas motor. L. M. Johnson, Jr., Box 32, Preston, Idaho.

Will give double catalogue of precancels (basis Hoover Bros.) for foreign (basis Scott). Send a selection or write. E. A. Sponholz, 930 Woodlawn Ave., W. Allis, Wis.

Want motorcycle. Maytag motors, traps, taxidermist outfit, .12 ga. or .20 ga. double. coins and stamps. Have anything. Arthur Heinrich, Granite Falls, Minn.

Will send one valuable formula for every United profit sharing coupon. Send as many as possible. Geo. Indecki, 3215 Hammond St., Detroit, Mich.

Have ½ h. p. Maytag gas engine, running order. Want guns, or what have you? M. Turner, Oakville, Ind.

Want to exchange stamps and coins for same. Have lot of Indian head cents for other old coins. Glasscock, 217 E. Fremont St., Fostoria, O.

Have ladies' and gents' coats to trade for books, watches, violins, guns, rifles, gem stones, French harmonet, make offers. L. C. Artrip, Gardner, Va.

Have a Red Ray lamp, complete, in perfect condition, also knee length, hunting boots, fair. For what? A. W. Thompson, 14 Valley St., Portland, Me.

Have Ilsley model cal. .32-20, Gibson mandolin with case, style A. Want good double shotgun. No junk. Clifford Rude, 112 So. Lucas Ave., Eagle Grove, Iowa.

Want shell collection. Have double barrel hammer gun, boxing gloves, camera, fishing tackle, and ice skates. Paul J. Poli, R. F. D. 1, Box 81, Ortonville, Mich.

Have 3A kodak with rising and falling front and R. & L. plate and film. Want F. accordion, or? A. Turner, 2927 Colorado Ave., Santa Monica, Calif.

Want rifles with cylinders. Mail me your list. Chas. Fritz, 4106 Main, Norwood, O.

Have new 8-day winding watch, fountain pen with check protector, box camera, bicycle, fishing trunk, offers. Max Belz, Waldoboro, Me.

ACE-HIGH MAGAZINE for each good arrowhead or good specimen of rough semi-precious stone. Harry E. Potter, 501 N. Russell St., Champaign, Ill.

Have stamps, violin and accordion courses, books, gladiolas and dahlia bulbs, etc. Want printing press, typewriter. R. Zilke, Baroda, Mich.

Have .22 Winchester pump rifle, postcard size kodak, new Oliver typewriter to trade for good shotgun or other good articles. Boyd F. Wells, 2702 Herman Ave., Ashland, Ky.

Want 6 passenger car. Have oil royalty in Arkansas, or? Jerome J. Reinhardt, 206 West 106th St., New York City.

Want printer's type, leads, borders, ornaments, business card cuts, etc. What do you want? L. B. Hall, 9304 Amesbury Ave., Cleveland, O.

Have electric train in good shape for any kind of a gun, also want war relics of all kinds. Forrest A. Rumsey, 334 Cedar St., Wyandotte, Mich.

Will swap views of my city for views of your city, any number at a time. C. V. Lanier, Gen. Del., Fort Worth, Texas.

Have I. C. S. Radio course, kodak and magazines. Want motorcycle, guns, or? All letters answered. Want no junk. B. J. Patrick, Amherst, Texas.

Have Gearhart all wear knitting machine in new condition. Want printing press, guns, or anything of value. A. A. Slaughter, Portland, O.

Want to exchange U. S. stamps with collectors in foreign countries. R. L. Orne, 1632 Mass. Ave., Lexington, Mass.

Want antiques, old walnut furniture, especially poster or post beds, or what have you, for pedigreed chinchilla rabbits, carpenter tools, or? M. Salts, 601 Kingshighway, Rolla, Mo.

Want birdstones, tomahawks, arrow and spearheads, Indian eagle cents. Tell what you have and want in first letter. F. W. T. Reynolds, 5217 Lincoln Ave., Detroit, Mich.

Have Columbia radio adaptor for phonograph and Brendes earphones. Want offers. H. Russell, 2923 Colorado Ave., Santa Monica, Calif.

Have books, "Lucky Young Navyman," "The Disposal of Silver Phil," "The Headless Hottentot, "The Mystic of Red Evans." Send offers in stamps to sell. E. Valentini, 105-26-52nd Drive, Forest Hills, L. I., N. Y.

Have Ford, Oldsmobile, Harley, Indian parts, movie films, magazines. Want anything. Want one cylinder motorcycle engine. T. Dyndiuk, R. F. D. 34, Plainville, Conn.

Golf clubs, tennis racquet, for any gun. Edward Stein, c/o Astoria Light, Heat and Power Co., Astoria, L. I., N. Y.

Will exchange match book covers with anyone. Send at least ten each trade. Want some from West coast or anywhere. Everett Norris, 3724 Fir St., East Chicago, Ind.

10 British colony stamps for every large cent or 5 Indian head cents. Wm. E. Bischer, 1531 Richard St., Dayton, O.

Have 300 cigar bands, 70 detective magazines, pair gold rimmed glasses. Want new or slightly used postcard album. W. F. Breen, 412 W. King St., Lancaster, Pa.

Have old Golden Hours, Happy Days, and Youth's Companions. Want old five-cent novels and old story papers. W. M. Burns, 15 Cottage St., Rockland, Me.

Want printer's type, leads, borders, ornaments, business card cuts, etc. What do you want? L. Hall, 9304 Amesbury Ave., Cleveland, O.

Illustrating and high school courses exchanged for other or art books. Albert Mantz, 260 4th St., S. W., Huron, S. D.

Want a complete taxidermy course with tools. Have old coins, books, watch, or? J. W. Herring, R. F. D. 5, Memphis, Tenn.

Have 40-acre northern Wisconsin hunting camp site. Want boat, printing press, lathe, or? F. Spalding, 502 N. 3rd St., Rockford, Ill.

Liederman course, Stillman's course in boxing and self-defense. What have you? J. M. Oliver, Park Café, Middleboro, Mass.

Have 1,000 postal cards, 400 magazines, for used and unused U. S. and foreign postage stamps. No trash. M. C. Sieklucki, 50 Elliott St., Hartford, Conn.

Want to exchange chinchilla bucks and does with someone. Have good ones. Write. Orval Stiegman, Thawville, Ill.

Trade one foreign coin for each arrowhead, 3 to 5 for each birdpoint or spearhead, also have large list. Send yours. Geo. Novalk, 4424 W. Fulton St., Chicago, Ill.

Want foreign stamps, 10 precancels for 20 different foreign. Will trade stamp for stamp with anyone, especially foreign readers. Fred Wach, Box 204, Waterford, Calif.

WANTED—INFORMATION

Are you looking for anyone who has been missing for a long time? If so, write down, either typed or hand-printed, all particulars and we will publish your notice in ACE-HIGH. *Notices may be listed anonymously if you so desire. Before taking action concerning any answers received, be sure to lay the matter before us. We assume no responsibility for this department. Do not send any money to strangers. Notify us at once when you have found your man.*

YATES, ALEX.—Last heard from when with Police Department in Wilmington, N. C., 1922. Was also once a cook in the medical department in the U. S. Army, Fort Caswell, N. C. Please write to an ex-soldier friend. Your whereabouts will be appreciated. James E. Pinner, 1st Asst. Keeper, Hunting Island Lighthouse, Frogmore, S. C.

NOLAN, WM. F.—Any information as to the whereabouts of this person will be greatly appreciated. Last heard of in Arcadia and Fort Scott, Kansas, last June, 1930. Is about 28 years of age. Bill, if you see this please write to me at the same place. c/o Vee Cee, ACE-HIGH MAGAZINE.

KEBBS, JACK—Twenty-four years old, last seen in Providence, R. I., heard from last in Conn. He is 5 ft. 8 in. tall, has light blue eyes, and light hair and fair complexion. Any information concerning him will be appreciated. Jack, if you read this letter, please write to Marion C., for I'm still waiting for you and need you. Marion C., c/o ACE-HIGH MAGAZINE.

DERMINT, LOUIE—I would like to hear from anyone knowing the whereabouts of my father. Last heard of in Oakdale, Penn. Leslie Eugene Dermint, Pocahontas, Ill.

CURTIS, ROLAND—Last heard from in [illegible] about 1896. Quite tall, dark hair, may be an [illegible]. Any information of him or his family will be appreciated. Bradford, 179 Denton Ave., Lynbrook, N. Y.

MORRIS, or JONES, WM. Last heard [illegible] Private in U. S. Army, medical dept., Fort Montr[illegible] S. C. Please write to an old friend at once. (Ex-Soldier at Fort Caswell, N. C.) James E. Pinner, 1st Asst. Keeper, Hunting Island Lighthouse, Frogmore, S. C.

Attention C!—Remember the time you said you w[illegible] to a nearby town? Trust me. A letter for [illegible] at this office, with strange news. I am dre[illegible] worried. You have all my love and sym[illegible]. Your B.

M. L. L.—Why don't you write to mother? Call her on the phone. News for you. Pop R. J. L.

AROUND THE STOVE

HOFFMAN'S HER FAVORITE

Dear Editor:

Can you find room for an English girl "Around the Stove?" I wrote you twelve months ago saying what I thought of ACE-HIGH *and other Clayton Magazines, and I can't dish up a grumble even yet.*

Please print this letter as I would like a lot of pen pals. I'd especially like to have letters from every country in the world and every state in the U. S. A. I am nearly nineteen years of age, 5 ft. 7 in. tall, have green eyes and brown hair. I will exchange snaps and postcard views and I'll answer every letter received. So come on and fill my mail box, you Clayton fans.

When will we be having another of Mr. Hoffman's comp[illegible] yarns, Mr. Editor? He's my favorite author.

With all good wishes to yourself and staff, I am,

Sincerely yours,
VIOLETT VAGG.

38, Carfrae Tce., Mt. Gold,
Plymouth, England.

"CAN'T BE BEAT"

Dear Editor:

Just a few lines to let you know how much I appreciate your magazine. I usually read about five magazines a week, but always hail ACE-HIGH *with joy. It can't be beat for clean, exciting reading.*

I wonder if any of your readers of either sex would care to correspond with me, as I have plenty of time on my hands and would enjoy corresponding with some of your "fans." I am a professional musician and teacher, have played in vaudeville and have broadcasted from quite a few stations in this locality. Come on, people, I want to hear from you.

Sincerely yours,
AL PRICE.

508 Wisconsin Ave., Milwaukee, Wis.

WANTS TO JOIN

Dear Editor:

I have been reading ACE-HIGH *for nearly a year now and would like to join the happy throng "Around the Stove." That is, if you can find room for me—and I verily hope you can.*

If this letter has the good fortune of missing the waste paper basket, I would like to hear from some pen pals, male and female. I would particularly like to hear from people living outside of the States. I am very much interested in all sports, and will endeavor to answer all letters that I may receive.

Wishing ACE-HIGH *all the luck in the world, I am,*

Sincerely,
HAROLD GOODYEAR.

5247 Lindsale Ave., Detroit, Mich.

COWBOYS—WRITE!

Dear Editor:

We have been devoted readers of ACE-HIGH, *my Dad and myself, and believe it or not, but there's a regular "battle royal" when a new issue is bought. Me I just always wins, but he devours its contents so rapidly that I haven't so long to wait.*

Now, Mr. Editor, I want your help in the matter of pen pals. Will you oblige? I am a girl of 19 years, weigh 115 lbs., am 5 ft. 3 in. tall, have coppery colored hair and hazel eyes. I am an ardent enthusiast of all sports.

So come on, all you cowboys and sons of the West, be regular and write.

Yours sincerely,
BEATRICE (BETTY) BREAULT.

47 Fulton St., White Plains, N. Y.

WANTS PEN PALS

Dear Editor:

I am a new reader of ACE-HIGH *and think it's wonderful. I [illegible] at writing, but I'll stand on my toes and tell the world that from now on I intend to read* ACE-HIGH. *You've got 'em all beat, and no fooling!*

Yes, I'm a girl, eighteen years old, five feet three inches tall, weigh one hundred and ten pounds, have dark brown curly hair and gray eyes.

Mr. Editor, please print this and help me to get lots of pen pals. Make it snappy, all you boys and girls, and write to me. I promise to answer all letters, just as soon as I read them, and I'll send a snap of myself—if you'll send yours.

Sincerely,
(MISS) VADAR REDMOND.

R. 1, Hartsfield, Ga.

HE'LL ANSWER ALL

Dear Editor:

I have been reading ACE-HIGH *for about six months and find it to be jolly good reading. I am very much interested in your "Around the Stove" corner. What are the chances for a lonely baker's apprentice joining? There seems to be a warmth and friendliness "Around the Stove" which is like a magnet. One just feels that they would like to get near that famous stove themselves.*

I am 19 years old, have sandy hair, brown eyes, am 5 ft. 8 in. tall, and weigh 145 lbs. Would you please publish this in some small corner? I would like to have pen pals writing to me from the four corners of the earth. I will answer all letters and exchange snapshots if desired.

Sincerely,
ALFRED OETWEIN.

R. F. D. 4, Bethlehem, Pa.

FREE AS A HAWK ON WING

SOAR away — wherever fancy calls you. Wing your swift and easy way over roads and trails to new adventures — to new cities worth seeing, and new people worth meeting.

Free as a hawk you are, when you're riding a Harley-Davidson. You breeze by car parades, and flit through traffic jams. Ride as far as you like, for Harley-Davidson cost-per-mile is next to nothing!

See the 1931 models at your nearest dealer's. Ask about his Pay-As-You-Ride Plan.

Mail Coupon for free literature.

Ride a
HARLEY-DAVIDSON

MAIL THE COUPON

HARLEY-DAVIDSON MOTOR CO.
Dept. N8G, Milwaukee, Wis.
Interested in your motorcycles. Send literature.

Name_____

Address_____

My age is [ ] 16 to 19 years, [ ] 20 to 30 years, [ ] 31 years and up, [ ] under 16 years. Check your age group.

"You won't be laid off!"

"It's tough when fellows get laid off. They've been getting [illegible] and everybody has been worried, wondering [illegible] next. [illegible] I've got young [illegible] [illegible] and I'd like a better job [illegible] I've studied them. So you see we need a little [illegible] and it's too bad we can't [illegible] go. If [illegible] and studied with the International Correspondence Schools, we'd be making good [illegible] men never need to worry about their jobs around here."

● ● ●

Today, in all parts of the world, through training supplied by the International Correspondence Schools, thousands of men have made themselves so valuable that promotions and raises come to them regularly. In this modern age, it is the trained man who goes ahead! You can become a trained man! Why not find out how?

Just mark and mail the coupon today

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS
"The Universal University"
Box 2113-F, Scranton, Penna.

Without cost or obligation, please send me a copy of your booklet, "Who Wins and Why," and full particulars about the subject *before* which I have marked X:

TECHNICAL AND INDUSTRIAL COURSES

☐ Architect	[illegible]
☐ Architectural Draftsman	[illegible]
☐ Building Estimating	[illegible]
☐ Wood Millworking	[illegible]
☐ Contractor and Builder	[illegible]
☐ Structural Draftsman	[illegible] Engineer
☐ Structural Engineer	[illegible]
☐ Electric Wiring	[illegible] Mapping
☐ Electrical Engineer	☐ Refrigeration
☐ Electric Lighting	☐ R. R. Locomotives
☐ Welding, Electric and Gas	☐ R. R. Section Foreman
☐ Reading Shop Blueprints	☐ R. R. Bridge and Building Forsman
☐ Telegraph Engineer	☐ Air Brakes ☐ Train Operation
☐ Telephone Work	☐ Highway Engineering
☐ [illegible]	☐ [illegible]
☐ Mechanical Draftsman	☐ Coal Mining Engineer
☐ Machinist ☐ Toolmaker	☐ Navigation ☐ Boilermaker
☐ Patternmaker	☐ [illegible] Surveying and Mapping
☐ Pipefitter ☐ Tinsmith	☐ [illegible]
☐ Bridge Engineer	☐ [illegible]
☐ Bridge and Building Foreman	☐ [illegible]
☐ Gas Engines ☐ Diesel Engines	☐ Poultry Farming ☐ [illegible]
☐ Aviation Engines	☐ Marine Engineer

BUSINESS TRAINING COURSES

☐ Business Management	☐ Business Correspondence
☐ Office Management	☐ Lettering Show Cards ☐ Signs
☐ Industrial Management	☐ Stenography and Typing
☐ Personnel Management	☐ Complete Commercial
☐ Traffic Management	☐ Civil Service ☐ Mail Carrier
☐ Accountancy ☐ Cost Accountant	☐ Railway Mail Clerk
☐ C. P. Accountant	☐ Grade School Subjects
☐ [illegible]	☐ [illegible]
☐ Secretarial Work	☐ College Preparatory
☐ Spanish ☐ French	☐ Illustrating ☐ Cartooning
☐ Salesmanship ☐ Advertising	☐ Lumber Dealer

Name_____ Age_____

Address_____

City_____ State_____

Occupation_____

If you reside in Canada, send this coupon to the International Correspondence Schools Canadian, Limited, Montreal, Canada

Peel Off The Ugly "Thorns"

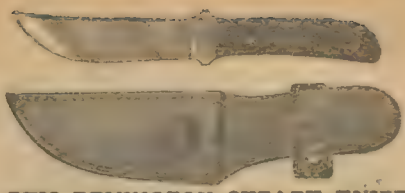
Remove Those Pimples, Blackheads Freckles and Blemishes This New Way

Have a New Skin and Youth-Like Complexion

READ FREE OFFER BELOW

LOOK in your mirror in just a few days after you do as instructed, and behold the clear, new youth-like skin and beauty complexion, instead of seeing those awful "thorns in the flesh" called pimples, blackheads, large pores, freckles, signs of aging and other disfiguring blemishes that hide the true beauty you possess, but do not know it.

This new discovery actually peels them off harmlessly, and they're positively gone. It's the most amazing, yet simple way of removing skin blemishes you ever read of, and all explained in a new treatise called "BEAUTIFUL NEW SKIN IN 3 DAYS" which now is being mailed to readers of this magazine ABSOLUTELY FREE. Send no money, just name and address and you will receive it by return mail, in plain wrapper. If pleased, simply tell your friends who may wish a clear, new, spotless skin and youth-like complexion. Address, Marvo Beauty Laboratories, Dept. 149-S, No. 1700 Broadway, New York, N. Y. Don't delay; write now!



THIS REMINGTON SHEATH KNIFE

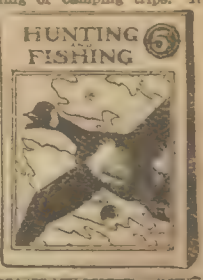
is just what you need for hunting, fishing or camping trips. It has a 4½ inch forged blade with strong, durable, keen cutting edge. Bone Stag handle and leather sheath. We will send you this knife

FREE

of charge on receipt of only $1 for a two-year subscription to Hunting & Fishing, a 52-page monthly magazine crammed full of hunting, fishing, camping and trapping stories and pictures, valuable information about guns, revolvers, fishing tackle, game law changes, best places to get fish and game, etc.

Clip this adv. and mail today with $1.00 bill to

HUNTING & FISHING
156 Transit Bldg., Boston, Mass.



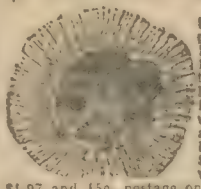
Part Time Men Get This FREE SUIT PLAN

CASH PROFITS ALSO

To introduce our new amazing values, classy styles and perfect tailoring, we make this introductory free suit offer—something different, better, bigger, more liberal than any other offer ever made. **Prices slashed. Amazing values.** Two-piece suits, made to order at $17.7 and up, with fit and satisfaction fully guaranteed. **$45.00 A WEEK AND MORE, Besides.** Big cash profits come easy to you. No experience needed, we show you how. Costs you nothing to get started. Our selling outfit is FREE. Write at once for our FREE SUIT OFFER and Cash Profit Plan.

PROGRESS TAILORING CO.
Dept. B-204 Chicago, Ill.

$-ALWAYS HAVE LUCK!-$



Unlucky in Money Games, Love or Business? You should carry a pair of genuine MYSTIC BRAHMA RED LIVE HIGHLY MAGNETIC LODE STONES. Rare, Amazing, Compelling, Attractive these LIVE LODESTONES are carried by Occult Oriental people as a POWERFUL LUCKY CHARM, one to prevent Bad Luck, Evil and Misfortune, and the other to attract much Good Luck, Love, Happiness and Prosperity. Special only $1.97 for the two. With valuable instructions FREE. Pay postman $1.97 and 15c. postage on delivery. Satisfaction or money refunded. **You can be LUCKY! Order yours TODAY!**

Dept. 257, P. S. BUREAU, General P. O. Box 72, Brooklyn, N. Y.

NOTICE! We absolutely GUARANTEE these genuine Mystic Brahma Lodestones are ALIVE! Just what you want, for they are the REAL THING—POWERFUL HIGHLY MAGNETIC! GET YOURS NOW!!

AGENTS

Men and Women make up to $8 and $8 in an hour, full or spare time. Big, worthwhile commissions on every sale. Exclusive Territories. Send quick for FREE TEST OFFER.

Works Like Magic!

At last! An automatic, simple little can opening machine for the home! This revolutionary invention in only a few short months has banished old can openers from over 100,000 kitchens. And no wonder! Imagine an amazing, lifetime device that holds the can and cuts out the top leaving can rim slick, smooth and clean. Just turn a crank, that's all. Approved by Good Housekeeping Inst., Modern Priscilla, etc. Write today for special introductory advertising offer.

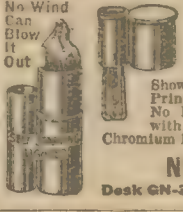
CentralStates Mfg. Co., Dept. B-2404, 4500 Mary Ave., St. Louis, Mo.

TOBACCO

Habit Overcome Or No Pay

Over 500,000 men and women used Superba Remedy to help stop Cigarettes, Cigars, Pipe, Chewing or Snuff. Write for full treatment on trial. Contains no dope or habit forming drugs. Costs $2.00 if successful, nothing if not. SUPERBA CO., A-11, Baltimore, Md.

No Wind Can Blow It Out



SOMETHING DIFFERENT

MYSTERY CIGAR LIGHTER

MAKE UP TO **$25 A DAY**

Showing this Scientific Marvel to Men. New Principle of Ignition. What Makes it Light? No Flint or Friction. All Guaranteed. Sample with Sales Plan 25c. Sample Gold, Silver or Chromium Plated $1.00. Agents, Write for Proposition.

NEW METHOD MFG. CO.
Desk GN-3 New Method Bldg. Bradford, Pa.

Follow This Man

Secret Service Operator No. 38 is on the Job!

FOLLOW him through all the excitement of his chase of the counterfeit gang. See how a crafty operator works. Tell-tale finger prints on the lamp stand in the murdered man's room! The detective's cigarette case is handled by the unsuspecting gangster, and a great mystery is solved. Better than fiction. It's true, every word of it. No obligation.

FREE **The Confidential Reports No. 38 Made to His Chief**

And the best part of it all is this. It may open your eyes to the great future for YOU as a highly paid Finger Print Expert. More men are needed now. This school has helped hundreds like you and trained them for high official positions. This is the kind of work you would like. Days full of excitement. Big salaries. Rewards.

WRITE and I'll send the Free Reports—also a wonderful illustrated book telling of the future awaiting you as a Finger Print Expert. Literature will NOT be sent to boys under 17 years of age.

Institute of Applied Science, 1920 Sunnyside Avenue, Dept. 15-C2 Chicago, Ill.

RUPTURES

Need firm but comfortable support

The patented Brooks Appliance retains securely without annoying springs or hard pads. Allows full body freedom. Worn and praised by active men and women in every walk of life. Over 3 million sold. Sent on 10 days' trial. Not obtainable through any store or agent in U. S., but made to individual measurements and sent direct from Marshall. Full information and free 28-page Rupture booklet sent in plain sealed envelope. Send for trial offer.

C. E. Brooks, Inventor

BROOKS APPLIANCE CO. **173-F State St., MARSHALL, MICH.**

PATENTS

Time counts in applying for patents. Don't risk delay in protecting your ideas. Send sketch or model for instructions or write for FREE book, "How to Obtain a Patent" and "Record of Invention" form. No charge for information on how to proceed. Communications strictly confidential. Prompt, careful, efficient service. Clarence A. O'Brien, Registered Patent Attorney, 187-F Security Savings and Comm'l Bank Building (directly across street from Patent Office) Washington, D. C.

LAW

STUDY AT HOME

Legally trained men win high positions and big success in business and public life. Be independent. Greater opportunities now than ever before. Big corporations are headed by men with legal training. Earn

$5,000 to $10,000 Annually

We guide you step by step. You can train at home during spare time. Degree of LL. B. conferred. Successful graduates in every section of the United States. Low cost, easy terms. Get our valuable 64-page "Law Library" and "Evidence" Books FREE. Send for them NOW.

LaSalle Extension University, Dept. 275-L Chicago
The World's Largest Business Training Institution

Buy Direct —at lowest cash prices on easy payments. You wear while paying. Watch sent for you to see and examine without one penny down.

RAILROAD WATCHES

Let us send you our beautiful watch catalogue showing the Famous Santa Fe Mogul Railroad Watch, and the 21-jewel Santa Fe Special in both 16 and 12 sizes. Also the new 60 hour Bunn Special. Catalogue sent FREE.

DIAMOND RINGS

Write for our New Diamond Ring of Romance and Bulova Wrist Watch Catalogue showing marvelous new designs. Never have we been able to offer such beautiful diamond rings and artistic dependable watches at such low prices. The catalogue is sent FREE!

Ask for our Special Spot Cash Offer. *Good for 30 days only.*

SANTA FE WATCH COMPANY
Dept. 255, Thomas Bldg., TOPEKA, KANSAS

To SANTA FE WATCH CO.
Dept. 255, Thomas Bldg., Topeka, Kansas
Please send me catalog I have checked.
Railroad and dress pocket watches ☐
Ladies' and men's wrist watches ☐
Ladies' and men's Diamond Rings ☐

Name .....

Address ..... City .....

Get Into The Shoe Business Without Investment!

We start you. Earn big money with our remarkable direct-to-wearer plan. Making profits is easy when you show splendid Tanners Line of shoes and Hosiery for men, women and children.

FOOTWEAR SERVICE for

Everybody Needs Shoes

Shoes are an absolute necessity—and Tanners Quality shoes at our low prices are a necessity that sells to the same customers again and again. Big advance commissions mean your profits come easy. We tell you how and where to sell.

We Supply Everything

We furnish everything you need to do a big business in your territory—set you up in a big and profitable shoe business without investment. We furnish you a $40.00 outfit containing actual shoes and hosiery—a larger variety of styles and sizes than any retail store can carry. Our patented measurement system insures perfect fit. Anyone can use this system—easily.

No Experience Necessary

It has no difference what you have been doing—you can make a big success of this business if you will honestly try. Write for big FREE book "Getting Ahead" and $40.00 Selling Outfit containing Actual Shoes and Hosiery.

Mail This SUCCESS Coupon

Tanners Shoe Co.,
892 C Street, Boston, Mass.

Without obligation on my part, send me my FREE copy of "Getting Ahead." Tell me how to secure $40.00 Outfit of Shoes and Hosiery. I will take good care of this Outfit.

Name .....

No. ..... Street .....

Town ..... State .....

How To Secure A Government Position

Write [illegible] Get a Government job! Increased salaries, steady work, travel, good pay. I'll help you become a Custom House Clerk, Railway Postal Clerk, Post Office Clerk, City Mail Carrier, Rural Carrier or get into any other Government job you want. I was a Secretary Examiner of Civil Service Commission for 8 years. Have helped thousands. Railway Postal Clerk examinations coming.

NOW FREE My [illegible] tells about the jobs open—salaries—hours—vacations—how you get one. Send the coupon for your copy today.

A. R. Patterson, Civil Service Expert.
PATTERSON SCHOOL, 1082 Wisner Bldg., Rochester, N. Y.

Please send me, without obligation, your free book "How to Secure a Government Position."

Name .....

Address .....

PATENTS

TRADEMARKS
COPYRIGHTS

INVENTORS to PROTECT YOUR IDEAS Write for our Free book, "HOW TO OBTAIN A PATENT" and Record of Invention Blank. Send model or sketch and description of your invention for our FREE OPINION whether it comes within the PATENT OFFICE RULES. Highest references. Prompt Service.

PAYMENT of FEES in INSTALLMENTS

VICTOR J. EVANS & CO.

Reg. Patent Attorneys. Est. 1898. 752 Ninth. Washington, D. C.

BE A RAILWAY TRAFFIC INSPECTOR

Railway and Bus. Earn up to $250 Monthly. Active men—19 to 55—needed at once in Railway and Bus Traffic Inspection. This steady, profitable work pays up to $250 per month plus expenses. Interesting outdoor work. Travel or remain near home. We train you for this and when position is secured. And our application plan lets you earn while learning. Write today for free booklet, and immediately upon receipt of coupon (stating from $1 to $5 per month or full cash price) we will send you a receipt for your tuition. Our free booklet tells what Traffic Inspectors can do for you. Send for it today. Don't delay. Write

STANDARD BUSINESS TRAINING INSTITUTE
Div. 13 Buffalo, N. Y.

DEAFNESS IS MISERY

Many people with defective hearing and Head Noises enjoy conversation, go to Theatre and Church because they use Leonard Invisible Ear Drums which resemble Tiny Megaphones fitting in the Ear entirely out of sight. No wires, batteries or head piece. They are inexpensive. Write for booklet and sworn statement of the inventor who was himself deaf.

A. O. LEONARD, Inc., Suite C83, 70 5th Ave., New York

EARN MONEY AT HOME

YOU can make $15 to $50 weekly in spare or full time at home oil painting photographs. No experience needed. No canvassing. We instruct you by our new simple Photo-Color process, and supply you with working outfit and employment service. Write for particulars and Free Book to-day.

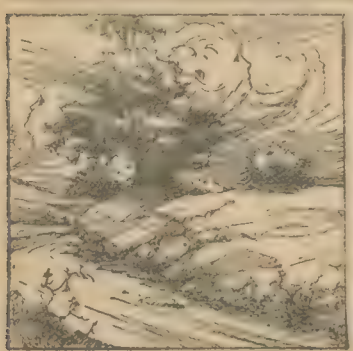
The IRVING-VANCE COMPANY Ltd.
152 Hart Building, Toronto, Can.

BECOME AN EXPERT

ACCOUNTANT

Executive Accountants and C. P. A.'s earn $3,000 to $10,000 a year. Thousands of firms need them. Only 8,000 Certified Public Accountants in U. S. We train you thoroughly at home for C.P.A. examinations or executive accounting positions. Previous experience unnecessary. Training under the personal supervision of William B. Castenholz, A. M., C. P. A., and a large staff of C. P. A.'s, including members of the American Institute of Accountants. Write for free book, "Accountancy, the Profession that Pays."

LaSalle Extension University, Dept. 275-H Chicago
The World's Largest Business Training Institution



Win $2,500 Or Buick Sedan and $1,000

You can share in great advertising campaign. Over $5,000.00 in 140 Prizes. Also thousands of dollars in special rewards. C. H. Lessig, Kramer, Ariz., Ind. won $2,500. Mrs. Edna Zller of Kentucky, won $1,800; and scores of others. Now better than ever. This is your opportunity. In our new campaign **someone** wins $2,500 **why not you?** Enter now—

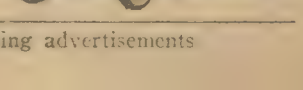
CAN YOU FIND 5 FACES?

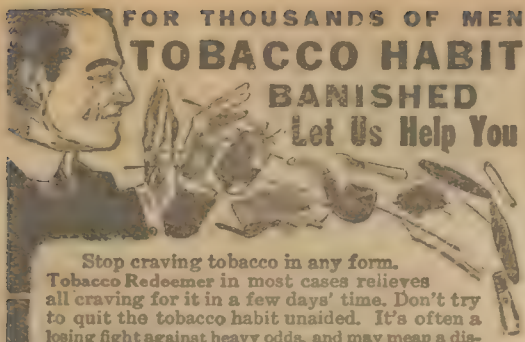
Strange faces are in tree, clouds etc. Some are upside down, others look straight at you. **If you find 5 or more faces,** mark them, clip the picture and mail. If you answer now, and take an active part, you are sure to get a special cash reward. You may win Buick Sedan, and $1,000 for promptness—or $2,500 if you prefer all cash. Mail answer today.

Send Today Someone answering wins Buick Sedan delivered by nearest dealer. Duplicate prizes in case of ties. No matter where you live, if you want to win $2,500 first prize money, **send answer today** for details. Can you find 5 or more faces? **Send no money. Alan Grant, Mgr. 549 Washington Blvd., Dept. 530, Chicago.**

$1,000 Extra for Promptness

If you are prompt I'll give $1,000 extra if you win first prize. Answer today!





FOR THOUSANDS OF MEN

TOBACCO HABIT BANISHED

Let Us Help You

Stop craving tobacco in any form. Tobacco Redeemer in most cases relieves all craving for it in a few days' time. Don't try to quit the tobacco habit unaided. It's often a losing fight against heavy odds, and may mean a distressing shock to the nervous system. Let Tobacco Redeemer help the habit to quit *you*. It is pleasant to use, acts quickly, and is thoroughly reliable.

Not a Substitute

Tobacco Redeemer contains no habit-forming drugs of any kind. It is in no sense a substitute for tobacco. After finishing the treatment, there should be no desire to use tobacco again or to continue the use of the remedy. In case the treatment is not perfectly satisfactory, we will gladly refund any money paid. It makes not a particle of difference how long tobacco has been used, how much it is used, or in what form—whether it is cigars, cigarettes, pipe, plug, fine cut or snuff. In most cases, Tobacco Redeemer removes all craving for tobacco in any form in a very few days. And remember, it is offered with a positive money-back guarantee. Write today for our free booklet showing the injurious effect of tobacco upon the human system and convincing evidence that Tobacco Redeemer has relieved the craving for tobacco in thousands of cases.

NEWELL PHARMACAL COMPANY
Dept. 793. Clayton Station St. Louis, Mo.

CORNS

and tender toes—relieved in 1 minute by these thin, soothing, healing pads. Safe! At all drug, shoe and dept. stores.

Dr Scholl's Zino-pads

Put one on—the pain is gone!

DIRECT FROM MOVIELAND
THRILLING LOVE LETTERS
LOVE'S PSYCHOLOGY BEAUTY PSYCHOLOGY

LOVE DROPS

PERFUME SECRET EXTRACT

A New Creation, an Enchanting, powerful aroma, with that alluring blend that stirs the soul of the rich and poor, old and young to surrender to its charms. $2.50 value, $1.00 post paid, or $1.27 C. O. D with instructions for use. Also Free our new book Love's Psychology and Thrilling Love Letters.

WONS CO. Dept. N-22 Box 1253, HOLLYWOOD, CALIF.

$90.00 WEEKLY Easily Made

Lowest prices in years for our all wool tailored-to-measure suits. Union made. Show our samples and make big cash profits daily [illegible] Big Bonus Offer [illegible] Quick. No experience needed. Latest styles, beautiful fabrics. Big FREE sales outfit of nearly 150 swatches.

$5.75 to $11.50 PROFIT PER ORDER Including Bonus

Dept. B-1104 PIONEER TAILORING COMPANY Congress & Throop Sts., Chicago

SHAPE YOUR NOSE

Anita Nose Adjuster shapes flesh and cartilage—quickly, safely, painlessly, while you sleep or work. Lasting results. Gold Medal Winner. Doctors approve it. 78,000 users. Write for FREE BOOKLET.

ANITA INSTITUTE
B-42 ANITA BLDG. NEWARK, N. J.

Get Groceries at Wholesale

AND A WONDERFUL CHANCE TO MAKE

$15 a Day *Besides!*

Yes, right now, I'll give you groceries at rock-bottom, wholesale prices and a wonderful chance to pocket $10 to $15 cash profits in a day. If you want proof of this, I'll tell you about Van Allen, of Illinois, who reports profits as high as $125 in a week. Gustav Karnath, a farm laborer in Minnesota, writes, "Made $20.35 the first 5 hours." Mrs. B. L. Hodges, of New York, says she never fails to make $18 to $20 a day. Of course some make more than others. But these big earnings of a few of my Representatives show you the wonderful opportunities. And today I offer you an *even greater* proposition than I gave these people. Give me a chance to prove it!

Big Profits for Pleasant Work

I am President of an old-established, million-dollar manufacturing company. We distribute high-quality Groceries and other Household Necessities direct from factory to user through Authorized Local Representatives. We have thousands of customers in every State. Last year our Representatives made nearly *two million dollars!* Now I invite you to share in these big profits. And I will give you Groceries and other Household Supplies *at savings of nearly one-half!* Thus you have a wonderful chance to *make* and *save* big money.

No Capital or Experience Needed

You positively don't need any capital or experience. No course of training is required. All you do is call on your friends and my established customers in your territory and take care of their orders. I never sell through stores. *You alone get the profit on all orders from these customers.* If you wish, you may keep your present job and start with me in spare time. Oscar Stuart, of West Virginia, reports $18 profit in 2½ hours' spare time. Mrs. K. R. Roof, of South Carolina, made over $50 the first week in spare time. This shows the tremendous possibilities.

FREE! New Ford Tudor Sedan

Not a contest. I offer a brand new car free to producers as an extra reward or bonus—*in addition* to their large cash profits. Mail coupon for particulars.

Send No Money

If you want to get groceries at our rock-bottom, wholesale prices—and a chance to make $10 to $15 in a day besides—send me your name and address at once. Don't miss this wonderful opportunity. Let me give you full details of my amazing new plan without cost or obligation. I'll give you the big opportunity you've long been waiting for. So don't lose a moment. Mail the coupon *today sure!*

MAIL THIS NOW

Albert Mills, Pres., American Products Co.,
7330 Monmouth Ave., Cincinnati, Ohio.

Send me, without cost or obligation, all the facts about your [illegible] to make $10 to $15 in a day besides. Also explain your FREE Ford Offer.

Name...

Address...

...

© A. P. CO. (Print or Write Plainly)

BIG PAY-Giving Away Shirts, Ties, Underwear!

START NOW SAMPLES FREE!

Our Free Offers Now Famous
Immediate opening for you to tell your friends about Carlton's national whale-of-a-sale! New merchandise plan *sweeping* the country from coast to coast. Big Cash Pay for you starts at once. Sales experience unnecessary.

1 Shirt Free with Every 3
Your customers won't match these values anywhere. Also 1 Tie Free with every 3....1 suit of lightweight Underwear Free with every 3. Free Hosiery, too! The plan's a business winner—a *proven* money maker.

Mail Coupon—Test this Plan
Complete line of gorgeous sample fabrics given free. De luxe presentation that hands you cash with every showing. Act at Once—Capitalize this AMAZING free offer plan.
CARLTON MILLS, INC.
79 Fifth Avenue, New York

Carlton Mills, Inc., Dept. 100-G
79 Fifth Ave., New York
I think I can give away Free Shirts, Ties, Underwear. Send your samples.
Name.....
Address.....
City..... State.....

NEW LOW PRICES

GOODRICH-GOODYEAR Firestone - U.S. AND OTHER TIRES

DEALERS WANTED

Thousands of satisfied tire users all over the U.S.A. Our 15 years of business speaks for itself. This big responsible company will supply you with reconstructed standard make tires at lowest prices in history—
Guaranteed to give 12 months' service

CORD Tires			BALLOON Tires		
Size	Tires	Tubes	Size	Tires	Tubes
30x3	$2.20	$1.00	29x4.40	$2.30	$1.10
30x3½	2.25	1.00	29x4.50	2.40	1.15
31x4	2.95	1.15	30x4.50	2.45	1.20
32x4	2.95	1.15	30x4.95	2.90	1.35
33x4	2.95	1.15	28x5.25	2.95	1.35
34x4	3.50	1.15	30x5.25	2.95	1.35
32x4½	3.20	1.45	31x5.25	3.10	1.35
33x4½	3.20	1.45	30x5.77	3.20	1.40
34x4½	3.45	1.45	32x6.00	3.20	1.40
30x6	3.60	1.75	33x6.00	3.20	1.45
32x6	3.60	1.75	32x6.20	3.50	1.65
35x6	4.45	1.75	All Other Sizes		

Send only $1.00 deposit with each tire ordered. We ship balance C.O.D. Deduct 5 percent if cash in full accompanies order. Tires failing to give 12 months' service will be replaced at half price.
RADIO TIRE WORKS, Dept. 107-M.
220 L. St. Northeast, Washington, D. C.

The CLAYTON STANDARD

Guarantees
THE BEST
IN
MAGAZINE FICTION

Play the Hawaiian Guitar like the Hawaiians!

Only 4 Motions used in playing this fascinating instrument. Our native Hawaiian instructors teach you to master them quickly. Pictures show how. Everything explained clearly.

Play in Half Hour
After you get the four easy motions you play harmonious chords with very little practice. No previous musical knowledge needed.

Easy Lessons
Even if you don't know one note from another, the 52 printed lessons and clear pictures make it easy to learn quickly. Pay as you play.

GIVEN *when you enroll* **—a sweet toned HAWAIIAN GUITAR, Carrying Case and Playing Outfit—Value $18 to $20**
No extras—everything included

WRITE AT ONCE for attractive offer and easy terms. You have everything to gain. A postcard will do. ACT!

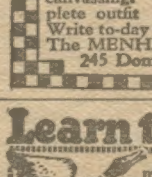
TENOR BANJO and other courses. The same thorough instruction on Tenor Banjo, Violin, Tiple, Tenor Guitar, Ukulele, Banjo Ukulele. Well-known instructors. Write for full information.

FIRST HAWAIIAN CONSERVATORY of MUSIC, Inc.
9th Floor, Woolworth Bldg. Dept. 269 New York, N. Y.
Approved as a Correspondence School Under the Laws of the State of New York
—Member National Home Study Council

MONEY FOR YOU AT HOME

YOU can earn good money in spare time at home making display cards. No selling or canvassing. We instruct you, furnish complete outfit and supply you with work. Write to-day for free booklet.
The MENHENITT COMPANY, Limited
245 Dominion Bldg., Toronto, Ont.

Learn to Mount Birds



Learn at home to mount birds, animals, game heads; tan furs, make rugs and robes. Complete lessons. Easily and quickly learned by men, boys and women.

FREE Write for Free Taxidermy Book. Tells all about it. Every sportsman, trapper and Nature lover should know this wonderful fascinating art. Save your trophies. Big profits. Success guaranteed. 100,000 graduates. State AGE. Write for Free Book.
Northwestern School of Taxidermy 3032 Elwood Bldg., Omaha, Neb.

LEARN Drafting $100 a Week Paid Experts

Our Big Free Book tells all about unlimited opportunities and easy College-Training-at-Home Plan. Creative draftsmen and designers command $5,000 a year, up. Architectural, mechanical, electrical, structural. Low cost; easy terms. All instruments, draftsman's table, etc., furnished free of extra cost. Founded 1904. Write today for facts and success records of graduates.
Chicago Technical College, Dept. B-274, 118 E. 26th St., Chicago

MORE MONEY FOR YOU SELL SHIRTS

Build a permanent repeat order business with Rosecliff's high grade Shirts, Ties, Underwear, Hosiery. Guaranteed One Full Year. Cash commissions, extra cash bonuses, shirts for yourself. We pay postage. Prompt service. Free sales outfit.... Write TODAY Dept. W-2
ROSECLIFF, 1237 Broadway, New York.

EXTRA STRONG IMPROVED MODEL COPPER BOILER

Catalog Free

SAVE 20% NOW!

Most Practical Boiler & Cooker

Made with large 5-inch Improved Cap and Spout. Safe, practical and simple. Nothing to get out of order, most substantial and durable on the market. Will last a lifetime, gives real service and satisfaction.

Easily Cleaned

Cap removed in a second; no burning of hands. An ideal low pressure boiler and pasteurizer for home and farm.

Save 20% by ordering direct from factory. No article of such high quality and utility ever sold at such amazingly low prices. Prices quoted are cash with order or one-fourth cash, balance C. O. D. Send check or money order; prompt shipment made in plain strong box. The only boiler worth having. Large Catalog Free.

HOME MANUFACTURING CO.
Dept. 7050
166 E. Kinzie St.
Chicago, Illinois

SHIRTS

Sell Quickly!

Sell Bostonian Shirts—the shirts of real value—and make money every week. Made of fine quality broadcloth, guaranteed fast color. Newest styles, 4 popular colors. Just one price—3 shirts for $5.95—and a liberal commission in advance for you on every sale. No investment or training necessary. We give you FREE compact Selling Outfit. Excellent opportunity to develop a steady profitable business. Write at once for FREE OUTFIT.

BIG money for AGENTS!

BIG free OUTFIT

BOSTONIAN Manufacturing Co.
89 Bickford Street
Dept. B-399
Boston, Mass.

NEW SCIENTIFIC WONDER

"X-RAY" CURIO

PRICE 10c

3-25c no stamps

BIG FUN BOYS You apparently see thru Clothes, Wood, Stone, any object. See Bones in Flesh. FREE Pkg. radio picture films, takes pictures without camera. You'll like 'em. (1 pkg. with each 25c order.)

MARVEL MFG. CO., Dept. 86, NEW HAVEN, CONN.

Easy, Quick Way To Get Into AVIATION

"I Will Train You AT HOME."

Major Rockwell

Learn to Earn $300 to $400 a Month

My new, practical Home Study Course offers you the quick way to get into this thrilling, fascinating business. I prepare you with the Aviation principles you must know in order to fill any of the hundreds of Aviation jobs requiring TRAINED men. I show you how to earn up to $300 and $400 a month in the quickest possible time.

In a Few Short Months

Give me an hour a day of your spare time and in a few short months you can be ready to enter this new industry. I will prepare you for well paid ground jobs open only to men trained in Aviation work. If you want to fly, my Home Study Course prepares you, and I will arrange for your flying instructions here or near your home at reduced rates. You risk nothing. If you are not satisfied after completing my course, I'll refund your tuition. Take the first step by mailing coupon NOW for my big FREE BOOK and Tuition Offer.

DAYTON SCHOOL OF AVIATION
MAJOR R. L. ROCKWELL
Desk J-6, Dayton, Ohio

Your Chance to Get An AIRPLANE FREE

When you become one of my students, I will give you a chance to get an Airplane Free of any Cost to you. Mail coupon for particulars.

Major Rockwell,
Dayton School of Aviation,
Desk J-6, Dayton, Ohio.

DEAR MAJOR:
Please rush FREE BOOK and Airplane Offer.

Name.....
Address.....
Town..... State..... Age.....

BIG BARGAINS BRING YOU STEADY CASH EARNINGS!

Barker of Tenn. sold 1800 pairs in a few weeks. Stanford made $15 first 3 hours. Longwear's Work Pants, Breeches, Overalls meet store competition. All-year sellers that everybody buys. Write TODAY for sensational FREE Sales Outfit. Address Dept. N-2

LONGWEAR TROUSER CO.
489 Broome St. New York

WANT A STEADY JOB?

RAILWAY POSTAL CLERKS

MAIL CARRIERS—POSTOFFICE CLERKS
GENERAL CLERKS—CUSTOMS INSPECTORS

$1700 to $3400 a Year for Life

No "layoffs" because of strikes, poor business, etc.—sure pay—rapid advancement. Many other U. S. Government Jobs. City and country residents stand same chance. Common sense education usually sufficient.

STEADY WORK

MEN—BOYS 18 to 45

Use Coupon Before You Lose It

COUPON

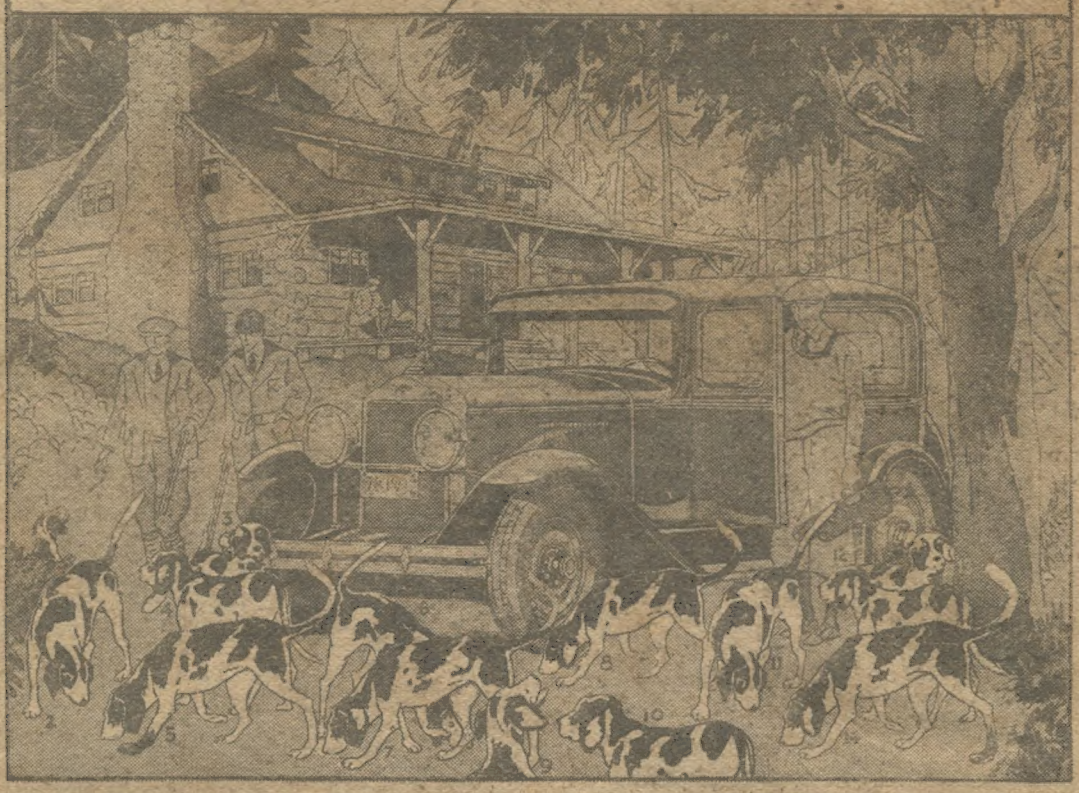
FRANKLIN INSTITUTE, Dept. T 259, Rochester, N. Y.
Rush to me, free of charge, (1) A full description of the position checked below; (2) 32-page book, with list of positions obtainable; (3) Tell me how to get the position checked.

☐ Railway Postal Clerk ($1900 to $2700) ☐ General Clerk ($1260 to $2100)
☐ Postoffice Clerk ($1700 to $2300) ☐ Customs Inspector ($2100 up)
☐ City Mail Carrier ($1700 to $2100) ☐ Rural Mail Carrier ($2100 to $3300)

Name.....

Address.....

Test Your Skill



QUALIFY FOR THE OPPORTUNITY TO WIN $650.00

THE hunt is about to start. The hounds have been unleashed and are impatient to pick up the scent. Somewhere in the pack are two dogs exactly alike—identical to the eye in size, pose, markings on the legs, bodies, heads and tails. How well developed are your powers of observation? How quick is your eye? Can you find the twin dogs? It will cost you nothing to try for the Grand Prizes which will be awarded according to the contestants' standings when the final decision is made.

If you can find the twin dogs send the numbers together with your name and address. Six thousand dollars to be paid in 10 equal first prizes. Each one $600.00 or a brand new Chevrolet, 2-door sedan, the model pictured above, with many extra prizes of $50.00 each—you can win one by being prompt—making a total first prize of $650.00 cash if you prefer. In addition to the first prizes there are dozens of other well chosen prizes which will be given to the winners in this unique "advertising-to-the-public" program. Duplicate prizes will be awarded in case of ties. Solutions will not be accepted from persons living in Chicago or outside of the U. S. A. Mail your answer today.

W. C. DILBERG

Room 8 502 N. Dearborn St. Chicago, Ill.

SCAN COURTSEY OF
EXCITER